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PRINTED IN U.S.A.









LEOPOLD I.



# LEOPOLD I *of* BELGIUM

SECRET PAGES OF EUROPEAN HISTORY

By Dr. EGON CAESAR CORTI

Translated by  
JOSEPH McCABE

*WITH EIGHT PORTRAITS*

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LONDON: ADELPHI TERRACE

*First published in English in 1923*

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## PREFACE

**D**UKE ERNEST II of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha tells us in his reminiscences, which were published in 1892, that no one had yet appeared who had dealt with the life and character of his uncle, the first King of Belgium, as fully and critically as the nature of that remarkable man, a prominent actor in the history of Europe for nearly sixty years, demanded. Even in more recent time no work has been published, since the life of the first two Belgian Kings by Juste, giving a full account of the career of King Leopold I.

The present work itself does not purport to do more than make a contribution to such a biography; as any attempt to write the King's life without access to the carefully guarded, and only partially published, papers in the possession of the English Royal House is bound to succeed only incompletely. I have, however, had the good fortune to examine a large amount of material that had hitherto been preserved in strict secrecy, including a hundred and thirty-six letters of Leopold I to the Emperor Ferdinand, the Emperor Francis Joseph, the Archduke John, Prince Metternich, Prince Schwartzberg, and many others. It is these which have enabled me to contribute to the history of the European policy of the House of Coburg, the large ambition of which only dawned upon me in the course of my work.

Through the kindness of the Archduke John's grandson, Dr. John, of the family of the Count von Meran, I was permitted to see the whole of the documents left



## PREFACE

by the Archduke, and they give us a remarkably complete picture of the tireless labours of the monarch. Amongst them I found a correspondence between the Hapsburg Prince and Leopold of Coburg, which had lasted nearly forty years, and was of the greatest political interest. My curiosity stimulated, I began to seek material relating to the Belgian King in the Archives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and of the Imperial House, now the State Archives at Vienna, with the very welcome assistance of the Director of the Archives, Dr. Mitis, and of Dr. Antonius. I found abundant material.

I have also most cordially to thank the generous owner of the Meran Archives, as well as the Ambassador Albert Mensdorff, of the family of Prince Dietrichstein, a grand-nephew of Leopold I, who very kindly supplied me with personal information, documents, and illustrations for my work, partly from their own collections and partly from those of the Coburg Palace at Vienna.

With the aid of all this material and a study of the relevant literature I found it possible to obtain a clear idea of the personality, the life, and the work of the Belgian King, and of the problem of Belgium. How this was conceived by King Leopold—how he made it the basis of the far-reaching family policy of his House—is, as recent events have shown, of the greatest importance to the peace of Europe. We have witnessed things which were foreseen and predicted by King Leopold more than three-quarters of a century ago.

The Great War was only a new phase of the Belgian problem. That problem remains, and its foundations are the same. English policy in regard to Belgium, for instance, is the same as it was a century ago.

The phases, however, which we consider in the present work chiefly illustrate the successful diplomatic struggle of Belgium to maintain its independence against encroach-

ments from the south : to protect itself, with England's aid, against French designs. It was only when the German Empire increased in power at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century that Belgium began to feel a menace to its security on the eastern side, and to devise defensive measures. The violation of her neutrality by German troops at the outbreak of war threw the little Kingdom entirely into the arms of the Coalition. Within the limits of the Entente, however, England continued to guard the freedom and independence of Belgium, and to ensure that the affection of France for its small neighbour should not become too intimate.

The following pages will tell how this question developed in the course of the last century, and how consistent has been England's Belgian policy since the days of Napoleon I.

In the forefront of my story I thought it useful to put the structure of world-power which a single Coburger, Leopold I, succeeded in erecting during his life. Not with weapons in his hand, not with a policy of force and violence, but by sheer reliance on his personal influence and ability, this Prince of a small German House won prominence in the world for the name of Coburg. Attained without bloodshed, his success has few parallels in history. On the example of Austria, which inspired the proverb "*Tu felix Austria nube*," Leopold of Coburg sought, first by his own marriage, then by arranging marriages in his family, to secure political relations which should enable him to have an active member of the Coburg Family wherever great political decisions had to be taken. After the Wars of Freedom the dynasties again became the foci of domination in the State ; and relationship with a ruling House meant influence on the policy of the State it ruled.

In what masterly fashion King Leopold spread the

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net of relationships over Europe, and even attempted to extend it to America, in order to acquire power there, will be told in this work; but if the reader cares to glance at the map at the end of the volume he will perceive at once how successful was the plan of securing world-power for the House of Coburg by means of marriages.

King Leopold neglected nothing that diplomacy, ability, and knowledge of men could accomplish. Thus alone could he play in the Europe of the last century the part which he created for himself, and sustained for decades. A large part of the power, the influence, and the wealth of this inconsiderable Royal House must be attributed to its brilliant member, the first King of Belgium. His clever manœuvring between France and England, his sagacious, if disingenuous, policy for the preservation and establishment of Belgium's independence in face of ambitious and covetous neighbours, are masterpieces of diplomatic art. It is hoped that the following work will give an idea of the versatility and the extensive labours of the man, and show that problems which agitate the modern world shook Europe and occupied its leading statesmen almost as much seventy or a hundred years ago.

THE AUTHOR.



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# LEOPOLD I

## *Chapter I*

### *THE YOUTH OF PRINCE LEOPOLD*

A MAN'S CHARACTER will assert itself at all times and in all circumstances, no matter how strait and confining they may be. Endowment and ability will succeed in breaking the chains which modest birth, untoward circumstances, misfortune or misadventure have laid upon them. The victory will, however, require exhausting struggles and an intense application of energy of mind and body; and this means that a man must divert power which would, in more favourable conditions, have been used in the proper fulfilment of his task.

Leopold, Prince of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, the eighth child of Prince Franz von Coburg-Saalfeld, heir to the Duchy, and of the beautiful Princess Augusta Sophie von Reuss-Ebersdorff, was more fortunate. A princely birth raised him high above the majority of his fellows, yet, being a small Prince, and not in the line of succession, he was not confined within any narrow circle. He found doors open wherever he turned; he could with ease and confidence approach the great ones of the world.

Attaining manhood in the days of Napoleon, he had ample opportunities for education, both as regards military science and diplomacy and statesmanship. The fall of Napoleon and the vast apparatus that was needed

## THE YOUTH OF PRINCE LEOPOLD

to effect it, and the rearrangement of Europe, threw upon the Vienna Congress more numerous and more intricate problems than had been experienced for more than a hundred years.

The birth of Prince Leopold, on December 16, 1790, fell in the period immediately preceding the French Revolution; the epoch of those sanguinary internal and external struggles which were to lend a character to the next quarter of a century, with all its shattering of the foundations of States and its initiation of mighty movements that have not even yet subsided. These times of confusion provided the opportunity for men of genius; just as they struck the hour for those who had for centuries enjoyed the advantages of hereditary nobility, high birth, and accumulated wealth, and must now, though personally innocent, expiate the deeds of their fathers.

The advance into Belgium and toward the Rhine of the glowing Republican armies of France, bitter opponents of nobility, was preceded by a stream of emigrant nobles; while another stream of fugitives from Alsace and the Rhine districts headed toward Thuringia and the interior of Germany. At the small and modest Coburg Court, at which the youthful Leopold grew up, were many of the former lords of the land from France and from neighbouring provinces which were overrun by the victorious Republicans. The little Duchy, presided over by Prince Leopold's father since 1801, gave all the help it could to the fugitives; and their stories of the Revolution and its consequences—bloody persecution, social unrest, the downfall of so many of the great, the emergence of numbers of so many small and modest personalities—must have made a deep impression upon all, especially upon the heart of the boy who now looked out upon the world with large, wondering eyes, little understanding its tortuous ways.

## JOINS THE RUSSIAN ARMY

The career of Napoleon, the new star—his victories as Republican General, his vigorous conduct as First Consul, his eventual rise to the throne—had upon the boy an influence that may be seen in the whole of his later life. By his birth he belonged to the world in which this outrage on “sacred legitimacy” was most acutely and shudderingly felt. His sister Julie was married to the Russian Grand Duke Constantine, and another sister, Antoinette, to Duke Alexander of Württemberg, who was in the service of Russia. His elder brother, Ernest, was at the Court of Frederick William III at Berlin, and another brother, Ferdinand, was in the Austrian Army.

There was, indeed, some thought of sending Prince Leopold to take a commission in the Russian Army. At the age of five he had been put by the Empress Catherine II on the list of cadets of a regiment of Cuirassiers of the Guard. Ten years had passed since then. The great war against Napoleon shook the soil of Europe, and the fifteen-year-old boy had an ambition to take his part therein.

Just then, in 1805, Napoleon had reached Vienna, to meet the armies of the two Emperors in Moravia. Prince Leopold, summoned by his brother Ernest, reported himself at the Tsar’s headquarters, to open his career in the Russian Army. But he had scarcely been installed when he had occasion to learn the vicissitudes of warfare. A few days after he had reported himself at the elegant Russian headquarters the battle of Austerlitz (December 2, 1805) was fought; and Napoleon’s genius put a speedy end to all the glamour.

The Prince returned home, and remained in Saalfeld during the years of Germany’s humiliation. The French swarmed over the country, on their way to Jena, and Coburg was not free from their exactions. The ailing Duke Franz, however, remained in the country with



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his family, including Leopold, and sought refuge in his château at Saalfeld. Duke Ernest, the heir to the throne, was at the Court of the King of Prussia, and the French annexed Coburg. When Duke Franz died, on December 9 (1806), the helpless Duchess entered into very friendly relations with the French, and even desired to visit Napoleon in person, to secure his good will and promote the interests of her family. Napoleon, however, refused an audience.

Her proposal was not without good results, as Coburg was one of the States which Napoleon attached while leaving the old rulers in their position. Some of them, indeed, he raised to a higher position, in order to ensure their gratitude. It went so far that in 1807 Duke Ernest took Leopold with him to Paris, and the Princes were received very cordially. One had to cut one's coat according to the cloth. The visit to Paris, to the capital of the Emperor who had brought Germany to the dust, was an indication that the Princes set their personal interests above those of fallen Germany, and were ready to kiss the hand that had struck them down and then, not without a most dangerous afterthought, restored them to power.

During the Erfurt Congress in 1808, when Napoleon met the Tsar and the four new Kings of the Rhine Confederation, a second encounter with Napoleon gave Leopold the opportunity to hope for an extension of the territory of his family, and make a request for it. All the works which appeared during the King's lifetime pass very hastily over his sojourn in Paris and his conduct at the Erfurt Congress. Reminders of these episodes were not likely to be very agreeable to the King. When, however, one is disposed to censure the attitude of the monarchs of the Rhine Confederation at Erfurt and the policy of the Coburg Princes, one must not forget the circumstances. The fragmentary condition of Germany

for a century had been such that it seemed by no means so scandalous for German States and Princes to adopt this policy. However that may be, Prince Leopold, now in his twenty-second year, executed remarkable changes of front. At first he was to be seen in the *entourage* of Napoleon, and he was repeatedly received by the Empress Josephine and Queen Hortense; yet, in spite of his begging Napoleon to promote the Duchy of his family, he evinced, even at Erfurt, some desire to re-enter the Russian Army.<sup>1</sup> For, while the Erfurt Congress represented a humiliation of the Princes of the Rhine Confederation, the Tsar, nevertheless, had a considerable independent influence, and Napoleon had by no means his own way. Although the Franco-Russian Alliance was renewed, the French Emperor felt that he might rule and command the rest of Europe, but not Russia and the Tsar. Prince Leopold was treated by the Tsar with great distinction at Erfurt on account of his relationship with the Imperial House. Napoleon noticed this, and, although he generally thought so little of German Princes that once, at a conference of all the Princes at Erfurt, he called to the Bavarian monarch, "Silence, King of Bavaria," he raised an objection to the young Coburger taking service in the Russian Army.

It seems that Napoleon would rather have liked the young German Prince to take a commission in the French Army. King Leopold says, in Juste's work,<sup>2</sup> that the French Emperor wanted to make him his adjutant, but he declined, and he got the influence of the Empress and of Queen Hortense to support his refusal. This is in flagrant contradiction with Napoleon's observations in the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*. We read there that it was Leopold who tried to secure the position

<sup>1</sup> Théodore Juste, *Léopold I et Léopold II* (Brussels, 1878), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Work quoted, p. 22.

of adjutant, but for some reason or other it was refused.<sup>1</sup>

Napoleon says, in fact, though his motives are sufficiently transparent, that at the time of the establishment of the Rhine Confederation, German Princes, as well as Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, besieged the Tuileries with requests for positions in his suite, in order to be able to decorate their persons with emblems of the ancient Holy Roman Empire. He cannot refuse himself the satisfaction of remarking that at that time the whole of Europe haunted the Tuileries. Constant also, Napoleon's Chamberlain, says in his memoirs that Prince Leopold, like many other foreign Princes, sought this high favour in vain.<sup>2</sup>

We have statement and counter-statement; but we may at least suppose that Napoleon would gladly have seen the Prince in the French Army, and that probably the Prince offered to do so on condition that he served in the Emperor's immediate *entourage*. That would not suit Napoleon. A German Prince was at that time not so reliable as to be put in a position in which he might learn the most important secrets and decisions. Leopold, however, would accept no other place, and so the whole plan broke down.

It would not be uninteresting to learn what Josephine and her daughter had to do with the matter. We know that the ladies were not insensitive to masculine handsomeness. At the time of his visit the eighteen-year-old Prince was extremely handsome; and a certain shyness and refinement of appearance added to the charm. Napoleon himself said that the Prince was the handsomest young man he had ever seen in the Tuileries.

Queen Hortense, who was on bad terms with her husband, Louis, King of Holland, and had left him,

<sup>1</sup> Comte de las Cases, *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, II, p. 411.

<sup>2</sup> Constant, *Napoleon nach den Memoiren seines Kammerdieners*.

## TENDERNESS OF QUEEN HORTENSE

was in mourning in May 1807 for the sudden death of her little boy, whom she loved passionately. But she soon found consolation, and, making the acquaintance of Prince Leopold at Malmaison, the Empress's palace, she was very pleased with him. The prince, young, correct, and inexperienced, was spoiled by the beautiful and unhappily married Queen; but he paid his court modestly, and the dallying remained a happy memory for both.

He saw her again when the Allied monarchs entered Paris in 1814. Napoleon was sent to Elba, and the Tsar paid remarkable attentions to Queen Hortense, who remained in Paris and adapted herself very cleverly to the new situation. She attached the Tsar, and through him obtained all that she needed for herself and her family.<sup>1</sup> Prince Leopold, being in the Tsar's suite, often saw the Queen, and the friendship of 1807 was renewed and confirmed. Hortense often spoke to her son, afterwards the Emperor Napoleon III, in later years of the radiant young German Prince, little suspecting that one day he would be so bitter an enemy of her son.

The outcome of the failure to join the French Army in 1808 was that the Prince drifted away from Napoleon; though the ruling Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld was to be seen at Dresden with the Emperor. The influence of Russia was now predominant. Napoleon was launching his great campaign of 1812, and Prince Leopold, whose two sisters were married at the Russian Court, who had served in the Russian Army, and never altered his relations with the Tsar, began to take a definite side with Napoleon's enemies.

The hope which awakened in Germany, in connection with the Russian campaign, that the hour of liberation from the tyranny of the Corsican was at hand, also contributed to make the young Prince shake off the impres-

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Turquau, *La Reine Hortense* (German translation, II, p. 60).



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sion made on him by Napoleon's victories of 1805 and 1806. He changed his attitude with the prudence which was an essential trait of his character. He recollected that he was a German, and decided to await the issue of the campaign of 1812 before committing himself to either side. When the great French commander at length met his master in the ice and snow of Russia, the vast expanse of the new theatre of war, the impossibility of equipping an army under such conditions with the resources of his time, the moment had come for the Coburg Prince to give a new direction to his policy; and it was the direction in which the wind now blew.

The reigning Duke had hastened to Potsdam, to King Frederick William. Leopold went to Munich, to enter into relations with Ludwig of Bavaria, once a general of a division of Napoleon's Army, but now an enthusiast for the delivery of Germany from foreign oppression. When, at length, Frederick William of Prussia put himself at the head of the liberation movement, and an alliance was formed of Prussia and Russia at Kalisch on February 28, 1813, it need hardly be said that Prince Leopold went at once to the Russian headquarters, and was, through the intervention of his brother-in-law, the Grand Duke Constantine, attached to the general staff of the Russian Guard. The succeeding months of the war were devoted entirely to his military duties. Far in advance of his age, the Prince, now twenty-three years old, found himself at the head of a Russian Army corps: a position usually entrusted to generals who had grown grey in the service. But cavalry easily tolerate, indeed often require, the hand of a young Prince.

Prince Leopold took part, as commander of the corps of cavalry, in the battles of Lützen and Bautzen, but we shall not be far astray if we regard his command as more nominal than real. It was not until the battle of

Kulm, in which the Russian cavalry co-operated with extraordinary success, that the Prince had an opportunity to take an active part in the fray and display his personal courage. It was, as might be expected in view of his princely blood and close relationship with the Russian Imperial family, rewarded with the highest military distinctions.

In June the Prince had had occasion, at Prague, during the futile Peace Congress there, to meet Prince Metternich, who had made Napoleon feel the still unbroken power of the Austrian State in the famous nine-hour audience of June 26th. It was then decided that the weight of Austria should be thrown into the scale against Napoleon.<sup>1</sup> This first encounter with Metternich had considerable influence on Leopold's subsequent career. The difference in age enabled the Chancellor to impress the young Prince, more than any other, with that note of superior experience and instructive wisdom which became increasingly a sort of second nature to Metternich, as his importance and influence grew, and to which even emperors and kings became accustomed.

In the further course of the struggle for liberation Prince Leopold continued to serve in the Russian Army. He took part in the battle of Leipzig, and, after staying for a time in Switzerland with his brother-in-law, the Grand Duke Constantine, he took care to be at the head of the Russian Cuirassiers of the Guard when they entered Paris. The close attachment to the Russian Court and Russian military circles which he acquired during these years helped to make the ambitious and gifted young Prince feel that he had a splendid field for the realisation of his plans in the service of Russia. He would have found it intolerable to take a subordinate position at the small Coburg Court.

<sup>1</sup> For the conversation of Napoleon with Metternich see *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen Papieren* (Vienna, 1880-4), vol. II. p. 461, and *Autobiographische Denkschrift*, ch. viii (On the History of the Alliances), p. 150.

## THE YOUTH OF PRINCE LEOPOLD

He went to England in the Tsar's suite. Here there entered into the life of the brilliant young Prince—so ably delineated in all his male beauty and bloom by Lawrence—a woman who, at one stroke, diverted him to a new career, and one that opened up entirely new and undreamed-of prospects.

Prince Leopold made the acquaintance in 1814 of Princess Charlotte, daughter of the Prince of Wales (afterwards George IV), heiress presumptive to the English throne. The domestic atmosphere in which the Princess had been reared was of a melancholy character. The later divorce of the King has put it in a sufficiently clear light. But the Prince Regent was also lamentably hard in his relations with his daughter. She must, he said, never have a will of her own as long as he lived, but must, whatever her age, remain subject to her father.<sup>1</sup>

The matter was put to the test when the Princess attained a marriageable age, and must wed solely according to the wish of her father. The choice was to be determined entirely by a regard for English policy, and it was decided to wed her to the Crown Prince of Orange, later King William II of the Netherlands. By means of this marriage the Regent proposed to acquire influence in Holland, and thus strengthen the part of the Continent that was nearest to England. Already there was some idea of the union of Belgium with the Netherlands, which was afterwards effected at the Vienna Congress, and the Regent hoped to obtain a decisive influence with countries which might serve either for the disembarking of English troops for service on the Continent or for the assemblage of navies or armies to be used against England. Of such an attack Napoleon had dreamed, though he had chosen the port of Boulogne. Not the least part of the Regent's design, moreover,

<sup>1</sup> See *The Memoirs of Baron Stockmar* (1892), vol. I, p. 4, and Miss Knight's *Autobiography*, I, 240.

was to control the mouth of the Rhine, an object which he trusted to achieve by marrying his daughter to the Prince of Orange.

In December 1813 the Prince of Wales had succeeded, by intimidation, in securing the betrothal of Princess Charlotte to the Prince of Orange. The wife of the Prince Regent, receiving information from Holland,<sup>1</sup> opposed the marriage; and the Parliamentary opposition also was apprehensive that it would entangle England in continental affairs. Difficulties of all kinds made themselves felt, both in regard to the choice of residence of the pair and the succession to the thrones of England and Holland. The Princess raised all kinds of objections, and there were prolonged negotiations.

At length, at the beginning of June (1814), everything seemed to be arranged, when, on June 7th, the Tsar Alexander reached London, with Prince Leopold of Coburg in his suite. The whole aspect of the Prince, his handsomeness and his intelligence, made a profound impression on the Princess; and as, in the meantime, she had become better acquainted with her Dutch *fiancé*, and had found in him much that was uncongenial, she broke with him on June 16th, and shortly afterwards declared her feeling for Leopold of Coburg. There was no explicit engagement, but Leopold returned to Germany with the prospect of presently becoming the Prince Consort of the Queen of the mightiest Empire on the earth.

<sup>1</sup> Stockmar, p. 15.



## *Chapter II*

### *PRINCE LEOPOLD AT THE VIENNA CONGRESS*

NEARLY QUARTER of a century of war, revolution, unrest and anxiety had passed over Europe. The Corsican, who had tried to win dominion over the entire Continent, and had even dreamed of conquests, in the footsteps of Alexander the Great, far beyond it, had been ruined by the excesses of his own ambition, to which even the resources of his genius were inadequate.

The Princes and statesmen of the victorious Allies now met in Vienna, to put in order the system of States which the Revolution and the subsequent wars had thrown into confusion, and to create conditions which were, it was believed, suitable for re-establishing peace on its old foundations: in a word, to act as if the preceding quarter of a century had been an unpleasant dream, and one could resume development at the point at which the French Revolution had interrupted it.

The Congress met at Vienna, not London, although England was the one State which had remained hostile to France throughout the Napoleonic period—the one which had issued as the strongest Power out of the confusion, and had, by its perseverance, shattered every plan to break the nerve of its people. Then, as now, the world was divided outside the walls of London, although—or, perhaps, because—a large part of it fell

to the British. England did not forget its part, but protected it amidst all the glamour of foreign power; it drew as little attention as possible to the immense gain which the fall of Napoleon meant for the British Empire.

The satisfaction of one's vanity, the itching for fame, the spectacular side of success, which draws upon one the hatred and revengefulness of the loser and the jealousy of others, has no part in a sagacious and dispassionate policy. English statesmen have always avoided it.

So in 1815 Vienna was the theatre of the Congress which was to restore order in Europe, to divide and subdivide it; as in 1918 Paris would be the theatre of the Conference which would divide and subdivide not Europe alone, but half the known world. And as in our time France and Clemenceau and Wilson received the credit and bore the responsibility for the decisions taken, so Austria and its Emperor in 1815; though the Emperor was eclipsed by the political star of his Chancellor, Metternich.

"In the Imperial Family," Metternich wrote to Count Apponyi, "I take just the same place as in my own."<sup>1</sup> That was very largely true. The predominant part which Metternich played at the Congress was destined at a later date to extend to nearly the whole of the Continent and all its rulers. The Tsar alone sought to oppose Metternich; but even he yielded in the course of time, and followed in the wake of the Chancellor.

England's interests were at that time more or less parallel with those of Austria, and it was therefore decided to restore the pre-revolutionary regime in France, to make a single State of Belgium and Holland in spite of their differences in language, religion, race and economic interests, to confirm the dismemberment of Italy

<sup>1</sup> *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen Papieren*, vi. 145.

## PRINCE LEOPOLD AT THE VIENNA CONGRESS

and Germany, and to re-unite Lombardy and Venice with Austria and thus increase the racial confusion of that State.

During the Congress itself there were thoughtful statesmen who found much to dissent from in these resolutions. There was, in the first place, the thirty-two-year-old brother of the Emperor Francis, the Archduke John, whose restless, versatile, and ever active mind saw much farther—politically, economically and socially—than most of the men of his time, especially the ruling monarchs. His independence of thought, his plans for the liberation of the Tyrol in 1813, his share in the project of the Alpine Confederation, to embrace not only the Tyrol, which was to rise first, but all the other Alpine provinces of Austria, are so many evidences of this. The Archduke wanted, with English assistance, to put himself at the head of the insurrection, win the provinces back for Austria, and hand them over to the Emperor.<sup>1</sup> A fellow-member of the Confederation represented to the Emperor that the Archduke was pursuing a selfish and ambitious aim. The distrust went so far indeed that the Emperor Francis, in a letter written with his own hand,<sup>2</sup> instructed the Archduke's General-Adjutant, Count Nimptsch, to watch his brother. The Archduke, who detested Court festivals and city life, was uncomfortable in the atmosphere created at the Vienna Congress. It is not surprising that he did not agree with the resolutions passed.

Oh [he wrote in his diary on September 20, 1814], if I could only express all I feel. Europe would then enjoy a long rest. The thing to do now is to forget, to put aside all greed and ambition. Mankind has suffered cruelly. It is time to do something for it.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Anton Schlossar, *Erzherzog Johann von Österreich*, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of Francis I to General-Adjutant Count Nimptsch, of March 7, 1813, in the Meran Archives.

<sup>3</sup> *Aus dem Tagebuche des Erzherzog Johann von Österreich 1810-15* (printed by Franz Ritter, of Kronen), p. 20.

The words had no echo. The Archduke found, however, at the Congress other Princes who shared his sentiments, drew close to him, and laid the foundations of friendships which, even if they were more or less selfish, had considerable influence on the statesmanship and general policy of later years. First of these was Prince William of Prussia,<sup>1</sup> brother of the reigning monarch Frederick William III, and the young Prince Leopold of Coburg. These united closely with the Archduke, and formed friendships which, though almost entirely personal at first, had later a good deal of political significance.

Prince Leopold would, with his elegant and youthful appearance at the social functions of the Congress, have had much more personal success if he had not already treasured the image of the Princess Charlotte in his breast. Naturally, amongst the diplomatists of the various Powers represented at the Congress, with so keen a scent for such matters, there had been a good deal of whispering. The affair, however, had by no means gone so far that the Prince could safely count upon the marriage. While, therefore, he did not neglect the many festivities, he was, nevertheless, more retiring than the other Princes, and thus he provided little material either for the Austrian secret police,<sup>2</sup> who watched every step of the foreign Princes, or for the frivolous anecdotes of Count de la Garde in his *Gemälde des Wiener Kongresses 1814-15*. In this work, in fact, Prince Leopold's great handsomeness and quiet disposition are repeatedly praised as proofs of his nobility by blood and birth. They made the young Prince particu-

<sup>1</sup> The Archduke John writes of him in his diary on March 24, 1815: "Prince William of Prussia goes to-day. We have said good-bye. Our friendship is established. When two souls have found each other, even death does not separate them. He is a father of a household, a noble German man."

<sup>2</sup> Fournier, *Die Geheimpolizei am Wiener Kongress: Eine Auswahl aus ihren Papieren* (1913).



larly suitable for playing, in such social entertainments as *tableaux vivants*, the parts which implied a large measure of male beauty. Leopold himself attached more importance to the opening of relations with the Austrian Imperial Family, especially with the Emperor's gifted brother, the Archduke John.

In the interest of his own small State, however, he did not neglect to have a part, as far as possible, in the decisions of the Congress. One of the most controversial questions was the future of Saxony. Russia took over the Poles with impunity, and Prussia had been encouraged in its design of annexing Saxony. But this enlargement of the rule of Prussia did not suit Metternich, who wanted to make Austria the first Power on the Continent, and so keep Germany dismembered and Prussia without any accession of territory. Naturally, the Coburg Princes, headed by Leopold's brother, Ernest of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, felt that their own interests were affected, and strongly opposed the proposal. They did all in their power to thwart Prussia's designs on Saxony. Prince Leopold spoke about it "very emphatically," as the Archduke John says in his diary, to the Emperor of Russia, opposing the cession of Saxony as unjust. The business was not calculated to strengthen his very slender sympathy with the Prussian character. On the contrary, it planted in the soul of the young Coburger an antipathy to, indeed at the time a hatred of, Prussia, which he expressed in very strong terms some time afterwards in a confidential letter to the Archduke John. He wrote :—

I crave permission to fall at the feet of your Imperial Majesty and pray you to take an interest in my poor brother [Ernest]. The Prussians persecute him greatly, making him suffer because he opposed the pirates in the Saxon affair. I thank my God that I am no longer in a position to be plagued by that godless crew.

Our excellent Wilhelm [Prince of Prussia, the King's brother] is a pearl amongst these swine. I except the Crown Prince also, but the others *are all worthless*.<sup>1</sup>

That was clear. Leopold never wholly lost his bitterness against Prussia. His friendliness to Austria in the German question—in opposition to the feeling of his confidant, Stockmar, and his nephew, Duke Ernest II—sprang from the sentiments which he had developed in regard to Prussia at the Vienna Congress, in spite of his sympathy with Prince William. In these sentiments he was at one with Metternich; the all-powerful Chancellor, while he favoured an autocratic and conservative regime, did not want to see Prussia too strong. He was far from disposed to help it to attain the predominant power in the German sphere.

Metternich had not very much to do with the young Coburg Prince at the Congress, but the identity of their views on the Saxon question, in opposition to the ambition of Prussia, formed some link between them. Leopold, who saw the paramount position of the Chancellor in Austria, was sagacious enough to keep on good terms with him, and, as later sections of this work will show, he profited greatly thereby.

The Chancellor, however, was always reserved in regard to the Prince. The new friendship of Leopold with the Archduke John developed better. The two Princes were very frequently together, and on one occasion the Archduke took Prince Leopold and the Prussian Prince to the festival of Seebenstein, near Thernberg, where a former lord of the manor, Anton David Steiger, had founded, on the festival, a society of "Knights of the Blue Earth." The object was to observe all the ancient usages of chivalry and preserve all its inner

<sup>1</sup> Prince Leopold to the Archduke John, from Brighton, April 3, 1816 (in the Meran Archives). The last three words are underlined by the Prince.

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sentiments. The Archduke had at first not particularly liked this "childish game," but he acquired a taste for it, and he invited his friends at the Congress to one of the knightly meals in the town, near his Thernberg estate. The friendship was sealed there, and each of them received a special name as a "Knight of the Blue Earth." Prince Leopold was named "Friedrich der Streitbare von Meissen."

This Seebenstein society of knights, of which the Archduke was now the head, later came to the notice of the Emperor Francis and of those Viennese who disliked all innovation or expression of an original idea. The fact that the Archduke John, who was decried as democratic and too popular, was High and Grand Master of the Society, strengthened the suspicion which arose in Vienna that it was a sort of hidden Freemasonry. The character of the Archduke, the tone of his diary, the unfailing loyalty to the Emperor it expresses, his strict orthodoxy and piety, and the entire absence of any such reference in his private and perfectly free diary, enable us to conclude positively that the Archduke never belonged to a secret society like the Freemasons, although he favoured many of their views. His roots in the Imperial House were too deep for him to step so far outside his customary sphere. But it was a note of distrust, very distressing to the Archduke, when, on April 30, 1823, the President of the Government, on express Imperial commands, ordered the complete dissolution of the society.<sup>1</sup>

This action was one consequence of the paramount position of Metternich at the Austrian Court. He scented conspiracies and revolutions everywhere, and he had succeeded so well in winning over his Imperial

<sup>1</sup> Another member of the society, from 1818, was Goethe's Maecenas and friend, the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar. His name was "Pant von Weimar." See K. A. Schimmer, *Geschichte der Wildensteiner Ritterschaft zur Blauen Erde auf Burg Seebenstein* (Vienna, 1851).

master to his ideas that the Emperor became capable of this public exhibition of distrust of his own brother.

Prince Leopold's excursion to Thernberg was followed by the speedy suspension of the Congress on account of Napoleon's return to France. The news fell like a bolt from heaven amongst the quarrelling and intriguing diplomatists and statesmen. The first thing that Napoleon announced to his people when he landed was that he was going to recover Belgium and the Rhine frontier. It was a blow in the face for England and Prussia.

The Prince left Vienna, and resumed his place in the army. As before, he took command of a division of Russian cavalry. But as Napoleon's final adventure lasted only a hundred days, ending at Waterloo on June 18th, the division never went into action. Leopold asked and received permission to go to Paris, which the Allies had entered. There he had an opportunity to intervene, in the interest of his own country, in the political discussions.

From Paris he went to Berlin, where he negotiated the exchange, sanctioned by the Vienna Congress, of certain small districts on the Rhine which had been awarded the Coburg Duchy. They were to be exchanged for others in Saxony which were of greater value to the Duchy. Prussia, however, refused to carry out its engagements. The Prince was dismissed, and his anger and detestation of Prussian character and policy greatly increased.

It was now some time since Prince Leopold's visit to England. The Prince Regent had not ceased to oppose the marriage of the Princess Charlotte to Leopold, but she had not forgotten the Prince; though she is said to have become enthusiastic in the meantime for a third candidate, Prince Augustus of Prussia.<sup>1</sup> Supported

<sup>1</sup> Lytton Strachey, *Queen Victoria* (London, 1921), p. 3.



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by those who saw in the connection with the House of Orange a danger to England's independent policy, by all who espoused the cause of the estranged wife of the Prince Regent, and, not least, by her real affection for the handsome Coburger and her determination to have her own way, the Princess had gradually surmounted every obstacle. Prince Leopold was, therefore, invited by the Prince Regent himself to visit England once more, and as his guest. This invitation, which illness and other untoward circumstances prevented the Prince from accepting until February 1816, meant the speedy fulfilment of his wishes. The wedding was fixed for May 2nd in the same year. Leopold received the full rights of English citizenship, and was made Duke of Kendal and a General of the British Army.

The German Prince, who was already in close relations with Russia, now acquired an intimate connection with the third great European nation. He had as yet no relations with France; but the presence of the Duke and Duchess d'Orléans at the wedding may have seemed to foreshadow this. The Orléans family had fled to England in the Hundred Days, and still lived at Twickenham.

With his wedding Prince Leopold had taken a step which implied great possibilities as to the future. There was nothing in the British Constitution to prevent the Queen from making the Prince Consort, by a special Act, a co-ruler. In any case, the accession to the Throne of his wife held out the prospect of exercising a profound influence on one of the most powerful, if not the most powerful, empire in the world. This influence was to fall to a small German Prince, only recently naturalised in England, and lift him high above all other Princes of his rank. The Princess had shown, in securing the marriage against the will of her father and a large proportion of the English politicians, that she

had a strong personality ; and she had a real affection for the Prince. She ever spoke flatteringly of his nationality. In January 1816 she said to Prince Esterhazy that she had a great sympathy with everything German, and "considered herself as much German as English."<sup>1</sup> And, just as the Princess put her English nature in a second place, to please her spouse, so Prince Leopold endeavoured to make himself English, and laid no stress on his German origin. This was the beginning of a development which was, during the next decade, to make the Prince almost a complete Englishman.

In March 1816 the Archduke John had visited England, at the request of the Emperor, to study political, and especially economic, conditions there. He did not confine himself to this, but carefully observed also the condition of the Court and the Royal Family. He recorded the results of his visit in a thick, ample diary, the exactness and thoroughness of which show how conscientious he was, and how varied were his interests.<sup>2</sup> As he was a quite neutral observer, his descriptions of English Court life are valuable. They let us see the conditions into which Prince Leopold married. The Archduke writes :

An Austrian Prince who is accustomed to a domestic, regular, well-ordered life, who has been impressed from boyhood that he must grow with his age, acquire knowledge which will make him useful to his country, set a good example, be loyal, obedient, and filially devoted to his Sovereign, know nothing of intrigue, cabals, opposition, or ambition, and lead a disciplined life, was bound to be deeply impressed by this [English] Court, and to be much more surprised than the nation itself, which was used to seeing such things. . . .

The old King, respected as deeply as a King can be by his people,

<sup>1</sup> Prince Esterhazy to Metternich, Brighton, January 6, 1816 (in the State Archives, Vienna).

<sup>2</sup> The Archdukes John and Louis seem to have kept a diary in common at this time. See Edward von Wertheimer, "Aufenthalt der Erzherz. Johann und Ludwig in England, 1815-16," in the *Mitteilungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Vienna, 1892), which gives in full, with additions, the description of the English Court.

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is blind and of feeble mind, and only his great strength keeps him alive ; it is quite possible that he may survive his son. . . .

The Regent [later George IV], a man of great common sense, but physically weakened by excess, is little respected by the nation on account of his bad company, his manner of life, the harshness of his expressions, his quite extravagant taste (for everything Chinese, for instance), his irregular household, and the many anecdotes about his private life. The prosperous issue of the late war and the glory of British arms may partly have allayed this ; but one must not be deceived by the deputations, addresses of thanksgiving, etc., as they are recognitions of his office, not tributes to his personality. During a few days stay in Brighton we saw his character clearly. We found him very sociable. He always rises late, breakfasts, and then is not seen until seven at night, when a large number of ladies and gentlemen come to dinner. He does the honours most elegantly, leads the conversation, and tells stories, some of which are not in the best taste. He speaks English, French and German fluently, and often laughs over the condition of his country. He is very imprudent in speech, and he has certain fixed ideas that become childish. Serious scientific conversation is excluded. At the most the conversation may at times drift to politics. His shrewd common sense then flashes for a moment, but he soon falls into extravagant ideas, so that his own ministers have to intervene and correct him. . . .

The questions of the Duke of Clarence were intolerable—always the same, and often such that we hardly knew what to say in reply to such ignorance. . . .

The most remarkable thing is the relation of the Regent to Lady Hartfort, who is nearly sixty, and must at one time have been very beautiful. She is always in Brighton, and is really the lady of the house, without showing it. She is a very elegant and fairly intelligent lady, and tells the Prince facts he ought to know. This connection, though quite canonical, displeases the nation, and there are many caricatures, sparing neither of them. . . .

One of his rhapsodical ideas is to dismiss Bernadotte and instal an Austrian Prince in Sweden (perhaps a compliment to us). His devotion to Austria is quite remarkable. The Emperor could not give him greater pleasure than by sending him a Field Marshal's Staff and the Golden Fleece. He was delighted. He spoke of nothing else but going to Vienna ; and he wants the Cross of Theresa. He asked if any service were necessary to obtain it. When we said yes, he suggested that a stay in Vienna might be enough. We tried to strengthen him in his feeling for a closer union of Austria and England, especially if Prussia could be brought in. This is necessary on account of France, and still more on account of the attitude of Russia. The Prince Regent hates Russia. The Tsar Alexander and the Grand Princess Catherine have settled Russia as far as he

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and his people are concerned. He made so little secret of it that the Russian Ambassador, Count Lieven, must often have understood it very explicitly. . . .

The spirit of intrigue, the frivolous character, the story of the breaking of the match between the Prince of Orange and the Princess Charlotte are sufficient causes of this. In taking leave of us at Brighton, he told us how sorry he was that insuperable obstacles (religion) prevented him from looking to either of us as a son-in-law, which he would very much have liked ; and this in the presence of the Russian Ambassador. . . . A good deal is just the mood of the moment. He has no firm character or strength of mind.

Such was the verdict of the Archduke on the father of Princess Charlotte. He was now to make her closer acquaintance during a visit to the Queen, the wife of George III.

The Queen [he says in his Diary], a little woman, was very amiable to us. She spoke German, and told us how much she was attached to her German fatherland. It is said that she is clever and does a good deal. Her daughters, no doubt, help much in this. We saw the Queen at Frogmore before we left ; the Princess Charlotte also was there. The Coburger was in London at the time, and the marriage was arranged. The Queen—clever, sharp, accustomed to ancient Court usages—and the Princess—ingenuous, free, unconcerned—were in strong contrast to each other. They did not get on well together. The independent ways of the Princess cost the Queen many a drop of perspiration. It is true, however, that the behaviour of the Princess is rather pronouncedly masculine ; though she is a well-set and beautiful woman, and has a most agreeable face. She must have plenty of intelligence and knowledge, and a good heart, but a rather independent and hard head. Everybody said that Prince Leopold would have a task. Lord Helens, a man of experience, replied wittily to the Princess's free expressions. We had little chance to speak to her, as she is watched by Argus eyes ; though she cared little about that, and spoke to us. That set afoot innumerable intrigues. The Coburger had to fight them, and his head, his cold blood, and his good sense triumphed. Many members of the family opposed the marriage on account of the succession. Cumberland, who unfortunately had the ear of the Regent and was jealous of York, contended that the Coburger would not get on with the Duchess of York, who was a confidante of the Princess Charlotte. But, in spite of the resistance of the King and his partisans, the engagement was very popular. It was even thought the best possible, and the Prince was said to have been born for it. As he is my friend, all that I had to say



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about him was good, as he deserves. He will certainly do credit to Germany. The Ministers go their way. They take the lead, and, as they are responsible, the Regent has to follow. *The Ministers, as a rule, do not deny that they are the rulers.* At a public dinner I heard Lord Sydmouth expressly answer the Regent, and on the first day of our visit, when we were dining with the Regent, we were startled to hear that, in a conversation about the wooden house sent to Napoleon at St. Helena, the Regent complained to Bathurst that he did not know who had ordered it, and the Minister [of War] replied, "I did."<sup>1</sup>

In a letter to Metternich the Archduke wrote :

Prince Leopold of Coburg came here, as you know, about a fortnight ago. As we have been good friends ever since the Congress, I was a good deal with him and heard much. He understands his position very well, still better the moody character of his future father-in-law. The best thing is that the Princess loves him, and seems to be ready to follow him. There is, however, no unity at all in this Court. The Queen, who is old-fashioned, requires flattery. She is regarded as very tricky, and is by no means liked. The second daughter, who is rather old, seems to be a bit of an intriguer. Princess Mary is the only one who is good to Princess Charlotte. The Duke of Cumberland, who is estranged from his daughter on account of his marriage, has the ear of the Regent. Unfortunately, there are rumours about him which are generally believed, and they make him disgusting. He is said to be responsible for the standing jealousy between the Regent and the Duke of York. The old Princess of Wales is not in the least respected by her daughter, Princess Charlotte.

The Archduke wrote to Metternich his impression of Princess Charlotte. He said :

She surprises everybody who has not been told beforehand of her ways. A well-set, young, beautiful woman with the features of a man in her conversation, intelligence, knowledge and wit : for the rest unrestrained merriment, disingenuousness, even a bluntness that is astonishing. She seems to have a good disposition, but is self-willed and quite indifferent to the knowledge that is required of a woman of distinction. A curious mixture.<sup>2</sup>

Princess Charlotte had no respect for her mother, so

<sup>1</sup> From the Archduke's Diary of his English visit, a folio volume in the Meran Archives at Grätz.

<sup>2</sup> Archduke John to Metternich, March 11, 1816 (State Archives).

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that there was no question of influence on her from this side.<sup>1</sup> The position of Prince Leopold, in fact, in the midst of these domestic troubles, and in view of the never-abandoned hostility of his future father-in-law and the unfriendly attitude of other members of the Royal Family with some expectation of the Throne, was not enviable. So the Archduke John observed in his reports. The marriage was, at the request of the bridegroom, to take place as soon as possible. The Archduke drastically described the difficulties which Prince Leopold had already overcome, or still remained. He wrote to Metternich :

Prince Leopold does all that is possible. He sees the necessity for a speedy marriage, and knows that no one could guarantee him against a sudden change of mind until it is over ; the more so, as the Prince Regent consented only against his will. He was always opposed to it. He wanted to keep his daughter under observation, fearing that she would take sides against him, as he had done against his father ; though in this case he would certainly have come off worst. The Princess has no regard for her father, grandmother, and many of her uncles and aunts. So Prince Leopold stands between the Princess and the many who are devoted to her, on the one side, and her father, grandmother, and aunts and uncles on the other. He has to deal differently with each. He has the difficult task of keeping peace and unity. I certainly do not envy him.

Castlereagh has won the regard of the Princess by his candour after a violent altercation. It was chiefly he and the honest Marquis of Anglesea who compelled the Prince Regent to yield his daughter. Prince Leopold is a Saxon ; that is to say, anything but Prussian or Russian. He is devoted to our Emperor, and therefore the best man for the position. His quiet ways, his courtesy, and his command of English win all hearts. It is a good thing that the Prince Regent does not cling to his earlier project of establishing the married couple in Germany. Prince Leopold promised to correspond with me, and I gladly accepted the opportunity. I believe that in many respects this is not bad, and that much can be done in this friendly way which you, dear Prince Metternich, will, if you think fit, agree to.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See also Baron von Stockmar's *Memoirs*, where the Princess is represented as saying to Christian Stockmar : "My mother was bad, but she would not have been so bad if my father had not been worse."

<sup>2</sup> Archduke John to Metternich, March 11, 1816 (State Archives).

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Thus the Archduke had made use of his stay in England to confirm and deepen his friendship with Prince Leopold. He found the Prince more than well disposed, because he foresaw that it might be of some use to him in the future to have as a friend, or at least a friendly acquaintance, the brother of one of the most powerful monarchs in Europe. The Prince, therefore, eagerly grasped the hand of the Archduke. He even went so far as to write him :

God protect you, my dearest and best of friends, at all times ! Command my services here, and I will always do anything that is in my power to carry out the wish of my dear friend.<sup>1</sup>

Metternich also was pleased. The Archduke informed him of the friendship, and the Chancellor was able to keep an eye on the course of it, so that the Princes should not start any political questions which did not suit his plans. It was an unofficial way of reaching the highest circles, with considerable promise of profit, and Metternich often made use of it. There was, however, one unpleasant circumstance. The Archduke was bound to know the secrets which reached Metternich in this way, and, as the ideas of the Chancellor were different from those of the reputedly Liberal Archduke—he was really a rational Conservative in his views—this did not suit him. The two men represented different types of Conservatism. Metternich, with his deeper, though (especially during the storms of 1848) often wrong, perception that the racial and political conglomerate of Austria could only be held together by a rigorous centralization and an absolutist regime, averse from revolutionary and separatist movements of every sort, sought, not very successfully, to realise his ideas by strict adherence to tradition, police coercion, and the withholding of any kind of culture from the people.

<sup>1</sup> Prince Leopold to the Archduke John, March 3, 1816, Brighton (in the Meran Archives).

Instead of prohibiting, restricting, giving the police full play, and suppressing the spontaneous tendencies of the people, it would have been possible to separate the wheat from the tares, to use one's influence in a general way, to lead and correct, without spoiling, the national development which tended toward a higher cultural level and even political progress. The system was wrong: the fundamental idea right. The events of our own time show that lack of a central and rigorous State-authority is bound to lead to the dissolution of a State compacted of such different elements.

The Archduke, a brother of the Emperor, a man devoted to his hereditary House, was as deeply anxious as Metternich for the preservation of the Empire. Pious, of correct morals, with the highest regard for the domestic hearth and the family, full of a sacred zeal to improve, to work, to promote the advancement of art, science, agriculture and industry, it was his most earnest wish to do everything in his power and incite those about him to do the same. That spirit breathes in every page of his diary. Rather emotional than intellectual, more intuitive than formative, far from self-assertion and strong will, he had not, in spite of his high birth, the influence on his country which his high qualities should have given him. He had the same dynastic ideas as Metternich; but he would march with the times. He would promote modern culture, but lead it, and keep it within due bounds.

We shall see later that Prince Leopold, who had much in common with the Archduke John, realised this in Belgium with rare tact; I would almost say, with a diplomatic regard for his people. He thus spared himself and his country the revolution which in 1848 swept over nearly the whole of the Continent.

Metternich, on the other hand, had qualities which the Archduke lacked. The Archduke was a warm friend



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of nature, and was, as he clearly showed by wedding a simple, gentle country maid from the ranks of the people, averse from courtly and city society, from the polished floor of the salon ; but Metternich could breathe only the air of the Court, and live only in a world of pomp, in the company of the great ones of the earth. Warm love of the fatherland they had in common, and both were very ambitious. But the Archduke was of a quiet, simple, one might almost say bourgeois, disposition, whereas the Chancellor was second to none in the ruses of the highest diplomatic art, and in the possession of a strong and clear will. Thus he became, and remained for years, the real ruler of Austria.

Prince Leopold met both these men in his early years. He studied their different natures, and attached himself to each, in order to learn whatever might be of profit to him and his new home in the promising future that lay before him. We shall, therefore, not be surprised to find, in the course of our study of his character, features recurring constantly that remind us of his relations to these two Princes. In his attitude toward the problems of his new country Prince Leopold had the advantage of being free from the prejudices which naturally beset those who had been born in the party-life of England, and he was prepared to act on principles of general welfare and progress. On the other hand, he had the disadvantage of incurring much hostility, at first, from the members of the Royal Family who were opposed to the marriage, with the Prince Regent at their head ; and he had, further, to conquer the distrust of a large body of the people, who did not like the idea of a foreigner as Consort of their future Queen.

Moreover, England was at the time passing through a severe crisis. The United Kingdom had been almost continually at war from 1793 to 1814. The war had ended in an immense moral and material increase of



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the might of England, but the various members of the Royal Family were absorbed in jealous conflicts for power. The throne had attempted even during the war to weaken the Commons, and thus to thwart the policy of the Whigs. In this effort to increase the Royal power, in opposition to the Whig tendency in Parliament, the Crown had been so strongly supported by the Tories that, in virtue of the corrupt system then in vogue, it was possible to manipulate the elections so as to retain power for the Tories until 1830. The struggle had been intensified by the appointment of the Regent, later George IV, in 1811; and it was further embittered by the economic and social problems which arose at the end of the war. Constantly varying conjunctures, which made it impossible to dispose regularly of the goods produced, led to a boom of industry at one time, followed by bad trade and unemployment at another. This meant a crisis, and hunger for the thousands of workers who lived from hand to mouth.

It was particularly interesting to see what position the betrothed of Princess Charlotte, independent of all parties, would take up. George III and, later, the Prince Regent, went over entirely to the Tories. Prince Leopold decided to join no party; in which he may have been influenced by the hostility of the Prince Regent, which was only overcome with great difficulty. He preferred liberty of action, and would bind himself to none: a policy which was unquestionably the wisest in the circumstances. If his wife had attained the Royal dignity he would have dissuaded her from throwing herself into the arms of any party. After their marriage Prince Leopold expressed himself about these matters in a letter to the Archduke John:

Our life is arranged by ourselves, on principles of great moderation. Amongst other things, we do not visit Society in the capital and we have announced that we have nothing to do with parties,



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and will only receive individuals, as such, whether of the Ministry or of the Opposition, who are friendly to us. I explained at the same time that I would have nothing to do with the trade of politics, and the fact of my not being a peer helps me. This pronounced neutrality is a great step in the direction of a quiet life. The father, and especially the Queen, began to meddle in all sorts of domestic affairs, but I very courteously and respectfully declined to have it. They did not take it very well, but they can say nothing against it. As, however, this is the only pretext they have for talking, there has been a good deal of whispering about it behind my back. It is of no consequence.<sup>1</sup>

Prince Leopold lived very happily in their marriage, sustained, as it was, by cordial affection and mutual understanding. The English people, never reconciled to the very unhappy and scandalous marriage of the Prince Regent and the lax matrimonial ideas of the other married members of the Royal Family, was very pleased with the model household of the Prince and Princess. They kept out of affairs, however, and at Claremont, an estate not far from London, they led, in the Prince's own words, "a peaceful and quiet country life," and were "glad to be away from the capital." As he wrote to the Archduke :

My domestic circumstances are the happiest that a man could desire, and my Charlotte is an amiable and glorious little woman. We have a mutual confidence and harmony which it would be very difficult for any evil-disposed person to disturb.<sup>2</sup>

The reports of the Austrian Ambassador at London, Prince Esterhazy, also spoke of the cordial relations of the spouses, which were the talk of London, and emphasised the contrast to the marriage of the parents-in-law. Prince Leopold had a very happy way of dealing with his self-willed and masterly wife. His fine irony in face of her fits of temper disarmed the young Princess ; and she continued to be enchanted with his handsomeness. He attached her to himself in a curiously intimate manner.

<sup>1</sup> Prince Leopold to Archduke John, July 13, 1816 (Meran Archives).

<sup>2</sup> We reproduce the original letter verbatim (Meran Archives, September 23, 1816).

## DEATH OF PRINCESS CHARLOTTE

It was, therefore, a terrible blow to the Prince, who regarded his future as assured, when Princess Charlotte died suddenly, on November 4, 1817, shortly after being delivered of a still-born child. The event not only broke up a happy marriage, but it shattered the entire structure of which the ambitious and energetic Prince, who felt that he had the gifts of a ruler, thought that he had, with great exertions, laid granite foundations. He lost, not only his beloved wife, but all the hopes he had entertained of a place beside the Sovereign of the English people. His grief was accentuated by the fact that, as was largely believed, the death of the Princess was due to the taking of wrong measures by her physicians, notably Sir Richard Croft, who committed suicide shortly afterwards (February 14, 1818). How deeply the Prince had felt his domestic happiness may be gathered from his declaration—not very flattering to his second wife—in his seventy-third year that he had never again known the bliss of that first short year of married life.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the severity of the loss, however, and the need, as the Archduke said, of “beginning life entirely afresh,” the Prince did not give way to grief and despair. His youth, his energy, his scientific interests and thirst for knowledge led him to benumb his sorrow by leading a busy life, and thus gradually acquire the necessary strength for the reconstruction of his life. He occupied himself with botany and history; and his letters to the Archduke recognise the beneficent effect of these studies.

At the end of a year the youth and vitality of the Prince had slowly, but surely, mastered his sorrow, and on February 4, 1819, he wrote to the Archduke:

My misfortune was the more painful to me as the very basis of our life was the work of my own efforts, and had become her pride. Now I stand alone beside the ruins of so much that was great and noble, shattered by death. There are times when the

<sup>1</sup> Stockmar, *Memoirs*, p. 67.

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tragedy seems as if its iron hand would strike me down, but I hope that it will not succeed. I have grown accustomed to fix my gaze on the future, the *only possible* goal of our existence, and when my eye is firmly set I can bow my head to much misfortune on this earth. This, and the conviction that it is our end and duty to work for the good on earth, keep me active. I have not lost every opportunity to work for the good, and I will use such opportunities to the best of my power, and go my way independently and honestly.<sup>1</sup>

It would have been natural for the Prince, at the death of one who alone had drawn him to England and linked his fate to England's history, to remember the land of his birth and return thither. But he had drunk too deeply the magic of English life. He had surrendered too much to the influence of his English environment ever again to find himself at home in the little German Court, amidst the confusion and pettiness of German conditions at the time. A short sojourn at Coburg at the beginning of 1819 was only calculated to emphasise the enormous difference between the two places. Moreover, the Prince Regent became King at the death of George III, on January 29, 1820, and he heaped favours of every kind upon the Prince, who was no longer dangerous. On his side Leopold, anxious to remain in England, did all that he could to encourage this disposition of the new King. He had done this, indeed, before George succeeded to the Throne. On February 4, 1819, he wrote from Coburg to the Archduke :

I have been particularly careful to keep on good terms with my father-in-law, and, although this is, on the whole, no light task, I can say that up to the present I have completely succeeded. I am, in fact, also on a very friendly footing with the Duke of York. As to the Grand Admiral, you know him ; it saddens one to think that he might possibly come to the throne. My fate is bound up with that of England, and, whatever befalls the green isle, I shall not easily abandon it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter in the Meran Archives, February 4, 1819.

<sup>2</sup> Letter in the Meran Archives. The Grand Admiral was the Duke of Clarence, later William IV, a sailor in body and soul, then sixty-five years old, amiable and blunt, and of Tory sentiments.

## BIRTH OF QUEEN VICTORIA

The country seemed to be as anxious for the Prince to remain as he was himself. His position had entirely changed. There was no longer a question of the throne, or of a position immediately beside it, but he had so far become English in sentiment that there was some thought of using in the interest of England his European connections with the ruling Houses of the Continent. His delay abroad was, therefore, not liked. "John Bull," he wrote from Coburg in April 1819, "who has his own ideas, does not like my long absence, so I am off in April."<sup>1</sup> In point of fact, he remained in Coburg until the early part of May. The remark in his letter is interesting as an indication that England had very definite plans in regard to the Prince, though they were not openly discussed at that time. He remained abroad from September 1818 to May 1819.

On May 24, 1819, the Duke of Kent and his spouse, Prince Leopold's sister, had a daughter, and she was destined to add lustre to the English Crown, and to play a very important part in the life of her uncle Leopold. Her mother, the Duchess Victoria of Kent, had married the Prince Regent's brother after the death of her first husband, the Crown Prince of Leiningen. The engagement had been concluded while the Princess Charlotte still lived, and had had her warm support, as it meant a still closer union of her husband's House with the English Royal Family. She had not lived to see the marriage, but she had, in promoting the engagement, helped to make her husband an uncle of the woman who was destined to wear the English Crown.

It was only natural that the newly-wedded ducal pair should support Prince Leopold as far as possible. They had spent a large part of the year 1818 at Leopold's estate, Claremont, and were much attached to the Prince. It was, however, not long before Prince Leopold

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Archduke, in the Meran Archives.



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lost his supporter. The Duke of Kent died suddenly, from a chill, in January 1820, and the Duchess was left with her little daughter, without any adequate provision having been made for them. Prince Leopold brought them to his house, and made no inconsiderable financial sacrifices in order to secure a fitting position for his sister and a careful education for his niece. It was not until 1825 that the British Parliament made a grant which enabled her to meet the costs of her establishment and of the education of her child.

These early years which Princess Victoria spent in her uncle's house were the foundation of the remarkable and very interesting relations between them in later years : an intercourse in which, regardless of differences of age and rank, they freely exchanged their views. Each learned from the other, and it is only in exceptional cases that we can discern a controlling influence on the part of the much older uncle.

Shortly before the death of the Duke of Kent Prince Leopold had felt the need of a wider acquaintance with the United Kingdom. He had rarely been anywhere beyond London, Brighton and Claremont, and he thought that travel in the country would enable him to judge for himself the economic and social crisis which then agitated England. In spite of the advance of the Whigs at the election in 1818, the Tory Government remained strongly established in office. Since 1790 English taxes had risen from £15,000,000 to £64,000,000 a year. The interest on the National Debt contracted during the war pressed heavily on the Budget ; and there was a fresh crisis in trade, which threw thousands out of employment. The Radicals stirred up the masses to give effect to their wishes by processions, protest-meetings, and, occasionally, violent disorder. The Government proceeded with great stringency. Police, militia, and soldiers were used ruthlessly on every occasion.

Prince Leopold visited especially those parts of England and Scotland where, as he said, "the stress was greatest." He wrote to the Archduke :

Real need, the lack of work, are at the bottom of the matter, and the demagogues have made use of this for their own ends. Our condition is, and will continue to be, difficult. The fearful interest on the National Debt keeps everything in this unnatural state. When trade stagnates, as is the case here, there is bound to be trouble in any able and mobile nation. For the moment the policy of meeting force with force has certainly succeeded, and it is too clearly in the interest of the higher classes to resist Radicalism for me to entertain any fear of it. The island has already survived so many and such menacing dangers that I have hope, though for the present the stars are not propitious.<sup>1</sup>

We already notice here that open eye for the sufferings and fortunes of the poorer which Prince Leopold would often show in later years. He seems to have expressed himself in England as he does in the letter to the Archduke, as there was some dissatisfaction in high quarters with his journey and its results. For a time the improvement in his relations with the Court since the death of Princess Charlotte was replaced by fresh trouble.

King George III had died a few days after the Duke of Kent, and the Prince Regent mounted the Throne, with the title of George IV. In the ceremonies connected with the change of monarch Prince Leopold was put on the same footing as the other members of the Royal House. He took the oaths of loyalty, and was one of those who signed the King's Declaration and the usual Proclamations.

On the other hand, his relations to his original home had been much attenuated. There were those in Coburg who blamed him for alienating himself so completely. They began to realise that he would remain abroad; though they were not quite right in their judgment. He had a very pronounced family sentiment, and, whilst

<sup>1</sup> Letter in the Meran Archives.

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the time spent in England and the absorbing attraction of English conditions and English society in those days had, naturally, a profound influence on him, this family sentiment reawakened whenever a new sphere of action on the Continent enfeebled the more immediate influences.

His health had been deeply affected during the few years after the death of his wife. He even thought that he was in consumption, as he felt that his health was undermined by his bitter sufferings from the loss of his companion.<sup>1</sup> The year 1820 brought him no joy. In the first place, England and the world were stirred by the action for divorce which George IV, blinded by hatred and passion, publicly brought against his wife, in order to prevent her from advancing any claim to Royal dignity. Alleged relations of the Queen with her Chamberlain, Bartolommeo Bergami, were made public. Her journeys to Italy, Germany, and Greece were travestied in the most scandalous fashion. Even Metternich's services were requisitioned in order to find proof of the Queen's guilt. All this put Prince Leopold in a difficult and very painful position. On the one hand was the King, upon whom he depended in more than one respect ; on the other the Queen, the mother of his beloved dead wife, upon whose head he could not wish to see this flood of suffering and shame poured. His proper place was to act as mediator in this melancholy tragedy, but he could make no headway against the King's obstinacy. Devoid of any refinement of feeling, he pursued his wife relentlessly ; although her guilt, if she was guilty, was certainly due to the bad treatment, even contempt, she had experienced from her husband long before any false step was taken. To the Archduke the Prince wrote :

We have had a terrible summer, one that I shall never forget, and the blow was all the heavier from being unexpected. The subject was itself of so delicate a nature that I kept out of it as

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Archduke, March 7, 1820, in the Meran Archives.

far as possible, and hoped that those in high quarters would not go to extremes. Unhappily, there is nothing so pernicious on this globe as the desire of personal revenge. It generally blinds—and we see the result. Before the case, which is *également scandaleuse* for all parties, began, at the beginning of August, when it was not too late to withdraw, I offered my services as mediator to the Prime Minister. He was deluded as to his proofs, and he felt that he could not accept. I pointed out plainly to him what the consequences would be, and he has since had very unpleasant confirmation of my prophecies. They will still not hear of moderation, and this may get us into a very dangerous business; at a time, moreover, when we might have been the most peaceful country in Europe, if this trial had been avoided. I will do all I can in the way of peace-making, but it is difficult to preach to passions and to escape the consequences which follow many of them. This winter I have kept quietly at home, remaining nearly all the time at Claremont. I am fortunate in liking country life. The heart is more at peace than in these incessant intrigues of the metropolis.<sup>1</sup>

There was also unrest on the Continent. In Spain the discontent of the officers and their relations with Freemasonry had led to revolts in the Army, and eventually to a considerable rising in the north. At Naples the Carbonari and the disaffected officers, who had formerly served in Murat's Army, were united in open revolt. There was a rising at Palermo which aimed at the separation of Sicily, or at least no more than personal union with Naples. These events made a deep impression on the active-minded Prince, who followed developments with acute interest. The successive occurrences greatly disturbed him, and the trouble was accentuated by a consciousness of his own powerlessness. He wrote :

It seems as if since 1790 everything is unintelligible, and things grow worse and worse. Events which gave our fathers topics of conversation for decades are now crowded into a single year. Who now speaks about Napoleon, yet what he was only seven years ago! Even here I rarely hear St. Helena mentioned.

The Prince's health now gave him great concern, and certainly had some influence on his ideas as to the

<sup>1</sup> Letter of November 28, 1820, in the Meran Archives.



future use of his failing powers. "Who," he wrote, "would dare to make plans in this inconstant world? Certainly not I, for since last winter my chest has been bad, and the times are very trying."

In spite of his poor health, however, the Prince worked feverishly at his self-instruction. Baron von Stockmar, his trusted physician and friend, tells us of the almost untiring zeal of the Prince for reading, and of his interest in everything that took place, political or non-political, in England and abroad. The divorce case still held everybody breathless in England. Under continuous pressure from the Government the House of Lords at length, by a small majority, declared Queen Caroline guilty. As there was general opposition to this in the country, which had always disliked the character and ways of the King, the Ministers did not dare to give effect to their success. They let the Bill remain without execution. Prince Leopold, who had, in spite of his plans of mediation, always remained at heart on the side of his dead wife's mother, determined, immediately after the termination of the judicial inquiry, to give public expression to his sentiments by paying an open and ceremonious visit to his mother-in-law. He has said a little about it in his autobiographical notes.<sup>1</sup> In this step he was moved as much by respect for his dead wife as by his incipient divergence from George IV and his natural chivalry. He knew well that he was bringing great difficulties upon himself. The antagonism of the King was, in fact, renewed on account of this visit, and the consequences were so unpleasant that he decided to leave England for some time and travel on the Continent. He would study different countries and their peoples and modes of government by consulting the more distinguished men in the lands he was to visit.

<sup>1</sup> Included in Grey's *Early Years of the Prince Consort* (1867).

## DEATH OF QUEEN CAROLINE

During his stay in Paris he renewed his earlier acquaintance with the Orléans family. He found France, in August 1821, "very prosperous"; though the members of the various parties, he says, "were more active than they ought to be." He thought, however, that there was nothing to fear for the country.

George IV's hated wife, Queen Caroline, died suddenly on August 7, 1821. Sudden death had so often fallen upon the English Royal House in recent years that it seemed a kind of retribution. Prince Leopold was deeply moved by the unexpected occurrence.

The death of my mother-in-law [he wrote to the Archduke], whom I had left in good health by all accounts, is one of those remarkable phenomena in which the recent history of England is so rich. It will change many things in our midst. I am glad that I am out of all the trouble.

The tragedy disposed him to lengthen his travels on the Continent and carry out his plan of visiting Italy, Austria and Germany. This would give him an opportunity, at Naples, to study the condition of a country kept in subjection by an army sent for the purpose of crushing revolution by an Austrian, Metternich. He found that, in spite of all repression, the inner sentiments of a nation live on in secret, awaiting the moment of expression.

At the beginning of 1823 he returned to England. For some months he lived with his sister and her little daughter Victoria. Of late George IV had been more amiable to her than he had been at first.<sup>1</sup> The Prince himself endeavoured to keep on good terms with the King, at least externally, but, after all that had happened, there could be no cordiality. This, naturally, made the sojourn in England more difficult for the Prince, and his travels on the Continent grew longer. In the next few years, to 1829, he was more frequently

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Archduke, July 22, 1823, in the Meran Archives.

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abroad—in Paris, Coburg, Silesia, or Italy—than in England.

During this period the Prince attached himself to a beautiful German actress named Caroline Bauer, who had won a reputation. She followed him to England, and Prince Leopold is believed to have contemplated a morganatic marriage. That, however, would have been an obstacle to his ambitious plans. The affair quickly came to an end when the Prince returned to the full light of public life, and decided to play a part in politics.

He continued to follow the state of affairs in England with great interest. The financial crisis, especially, which the country suffered in 1825–6, much occupied his mind. He had the greatest sympathy with the modern tendencies and aims of Canning. He was much concerned about Canning's health, and wrote to the Archduke that it would be a terrible loss to England if anything happened to the Minister.<sup>1</sup>

The intensity of England's political life, the succession of changes, the increasingly pronounced struggles of Whig and Tory, the economic crises and the measures of statesmen to allay them, and the momentary glimpses of the great non-political questions of England and the rest of Europe had given the Prince, who chafed in his enforced idleness, an irresistible impulse to make some use of all that he had learned. He would at length use his powers actively, and play the part which his position and endowment fitted him to play. English statesmen knew that this was what he wanted, and they began to think of some way of using his ability. His special character—as an international, though thoroughly Anglicised, must be turned to England's advantage.

An opportunity arose when, in 1827, England and Russia, and presently France, espoused the cause of

<sup>1</sup> Letter of December 11, 1825, in the Meran Archives. Canning died on August 8, 1827.

## REFUSES THE GREEK CROWN

the insurgent Greeks, to the great indignation of the anti-revolutionary Metternich, and proposed to help them to free their classic land from the Turkish yoke. After the battle of Navarino (1827), in which the fleets of the Allied Powers defeated the Turkish fleet; and the unfortunate episode of the Presidency of Capodistria in Greece, the independence of the country was declared in a protocol of February 3, 1830. Leopold of Coburg was contemplated as the future King. The origin and course of this candidature have been described in various works, and there is no need to say more here. But a few observations will serve to show that the official publications, the diplomatic documents relating to the question, Stockmar's reminiscences, and the personal assurances of Prince Leopold himself by way of reply to the account of his candidature in the work of the historian Gervinus, are rather calculated to mislead in regard to the reasons for this refusal.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that the mere thought of being at the head of a nation and at length attaining the long-sought sphere of action gave great pleasure to the Prince. He made no secret of the fact that he looked forward to the task very gladly. Since 1825 there had been negotiations between the Prince, confidential Greek representatives, and the British Government, but they did not take definite shape until it was decided to make Greece independent. It was the Prince's wish to, as he said, "do good in a country where there would have to be a good deal of reconstruction before it could be anything like what it was even in the Middle Ages."<sup>2</sup>

Full of his mission, conscious that he could do great things in discharging it, flattered by the consent of

<sup>1</sup> Stockmar, *Memoirs*, ch. v, and English publications in the *State Papers*, Session 1830, fol. 32 ("Communications with His Royal Highness Prince Leopold relating to the sovereignty of Greece and further communications, etc."). The relevant White Books are in the State Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to the Archduke, November 2, 1830, in the Meran Archives.



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Russia, France and England, Prince Leopold, without closely examining the situation, accepted the offer of the Crown of Greece which was made at the end of February. King George, however, had not agreed. He had never become reconciled to the Prince, and he was under the influence of his brother, the Duke of Cumberland. The Duke, jealous of Wellington, who favoured the candidature and was Prime Minister as well as the hero of Waterloo, opposed him in everything. He wanted the Greek throne for his brother-in-law, Duke Karl of Mecklenburg-Strelitz.

Wellington resented these interferences. He determined to see whether he or some other person held the influence over the King which belonged to him as Prime Minister, and he threatened to retire if the King did not consent to Prince Leopold's candidature. The Prince was astonished that the Tory Minister should engage himself so deeply in the matter. He had by no means anticipated a champion of this type. Was there not some political move of the Tories behind it? While the King, who disliked him, was of Tory sentiments, Prince Leopold had in recent years, in spite of his own principles, drawn nearer to the Opposition, which was more in consonance with his views. Its leading men—Durham, Brougham, etc.—were more satisfactory to his ideas and development than the rigid defenders of Toryism. Hence before the end of February he became more cautious about the Greek offer. He began to lay down conditions and say that his acceptance depended upon compliance with these. He had a suspicion that the Tory Ministry was too zealous to remove him from England. Moreover, the King's health was not good. The succession would fall to the aged and ailing Duke of Clarence, and, after that, Leopold's niece, Victoria, would be next in the line of succession.

In view of these possibilities, Victoria's mother,

## REASONS FOR THE REFUSAL

Prince Leopold's sister, pressed him not to go so far away as Greece: not to leave her so completely and sacrifice his position in England and lose, more or less, his influence. On the other side he was attracted by the position of independence, the Crown, the large sphere of action, and a certain interest in the East and Oriental affairs. Prince Leopold decided, therefore, to accept on certain conditions which represented him to the Greek people as one who would fulfil hopes they had long cherished, and would make his dominion easier in every respect. If the conditions were refused, he would remain in England.

Count Capodistria, formerly head of the Chancellory of the Tsar Alexander I, President of the Greek State since 1827, naturally regarded his displacement by a monarch as derogatory, but, if this change were unavoidable, he preferred that the monarch should be Prince Leopold. He remembered him from his Russian days, and he hoped still to rule Greece under the flag of a foreign Prince. Leopold at once begged him to continue his efforts for the restoration of the country under the new regime, and trusted to have the aid of his counsel in his difficult work. It was, in fact, Capodistria who had proposed Leopold, but under pressure. He was not disposed to make the way too smooth for him. That was why he pointed out to him the desire of the Greek nation for Crete, Samos, and the Ionian Islands, and the extension of the northern frontier, knowing well that these demands would raise formidable difficulties. The territorial demands, in particular, met with a stubborn resistance in England. Cyprus was not then in England's possession, and, if any other Power than Turkey was to have Crete and the Ionian Islands, England was supposed to have the first right. For the present, however, they were to be given back to Turkey. If they were ceded to Greece, it would be more difficult

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than ever, if not impossible, for England to get them. So the Tory Ministry opposed the Prince in this matter. He still thought, however, that there was hope, and in April 1830 he did not relax his efforts to raise a loan for Greece in Paris.

Then occurred another incident. In the middle of April (1830) King George became seriously ill, and Leopold's concern about his removal from England revived. Capodistria, also, set to work. He had, in view of the difficulties, which he had foreseen, in connection with Leopold's territorial demands, conceived a fresh hope that the plan would break down and leave him in his position. He therefore wrote to the Prince that the Greek people would never consent to abandon their territorial demands, and would make very serious difficulties for him.

Thus there were many reasons for Prince Leopold's final refusal. In his history of the nineteenth century Gervinus has given only one—the idea that a Regency in England was possible.<sup>1</sup> King Leopold, in his reply to this, has thrown the whole of the blame upon the Ministers Wellington and Aberdeen, and denies the idea of a Regency.<sup>2</sup> But both reasons had some influence, as well as the failure to secure the territorial demands of the Greeks. It was under the stress of all the motives that we have given that the Prince made such large demands. The predominance of English interests in the refusal of Crete and the Islands, the reluctance of the Prince to leave home, and the suspicion that in his new position he would not prove merely a ready tool of the Tory policy in the East, were the reasons why, in the end, the problem had to be solved by choosing a Bavarian Prince.

Leopold often regretted in later years that he did not

<sup>1</sup> Gervinus, *Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Band VI, p. 532.

<sup>2</sup> Printed in the *Deutsche Revue*, June 1884 (Jahrgang ix, Bd. II).

get the Greek Crown. "It was to the interest of every State," he wrote to the Archduke on October 2, 1830, "that the new and feeble creation, Greece, should become as independent and vigorous as possible; but confused ideas frustrated this in an unpolitical way." He lays the stress on "independent," and thus shows that England wanted to impose severe restrictions. Many years afterwards, when he had long been established, as King of Belgium, in a large and splendid sphere of action, he spoke again to his friend of the Greek question:

Prince William of Prussia also wrote me that you had regretted my being linked to the country in which I am. I have certainly often been sorry that I did not attain my object in the East. I fancy that I could have done much good there. Indeed, although I know well the disadvantages, I often have a sort of home-sickness for it. How strange my fate has been since we were together in Brighton with the Prince Regent! Had I taken the reins [in England] in 1830, much would not have happened in England, and what was bound to happen would have been guided with more discretion.<sup>1</sup>

This letter confirms the view that, at the time when Prince Leopold had to decide about the Greek Throne, he had an idea of playing at home a part which, in spite of his wife's death, would make him, at least for a time, the ruler of England. One quite understands why in later years the King wanted for political reasons, as at the time he had wanted for special reasons, to make people believe that it was solely a question of Greek interests, which were opposed by the English Ministers, that had inspired his refusal. For at that time (1862) the Bavarian King Otto in Greece had, in Leopold's own words, "failed," and Leopold thought of proposing his nephew, Duke Ernest II of Saxe-Coburg, to replace him. We see that the account which the seventy-two-year-old Belgian King published in reply to Gervinus was merely a matter of diplomacy and policy.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Archduke, February 18, 1862, in the Meran Archives.



### Chapter III

## THE BELGIAN REVOLUTION AND THE ACCESSION OF KING LEOPOLD

THE LONDON Conference of representatives of the five great Powers was continued in May 1830, after Leopold's refusal of the Crown, to find a new solution of the Greek question. Upon their deliberations broke the news of the July Revolution at Paris, which drove Charles X from the throne and enabled the bourgeois King, Louis Philippe d'Orléans, to take the Crown "from the hand of the people." The Greek question, which had kept all the Chancellories of Europe in suspense, fell into the background.

The new and formidable events made a deep impression on the Prince. He wrote to the Archduke :

Since this comparative trifle occupied the mind of Europe, what a frightful storm [the July Revolution] has broken over us ! It was clear to me last autumn, when I was in Paris, that something was wrong ; but no attention was paid to warnings. When I was in Paris this spring, the clouds were gathering thicker. I told Polignac plainly of my concern, but he said, as usual, that I need not fear for the future. The Revolution became possible in France because the Government was so inept as *se mettre dans le tort*. But it will have terrible consequences for every country. To me the worst disorders are those in Belgium. There is grave fear that they may cause a war between the Powers.<sup>1</sup>

Events in Paris had, in fact, speedily found an echo in Belgium, where the conditions were peculiarly favourable. During the French Revolution the country had been

<sup>1</sup> Letter (from Malvern) in the Meran Archives, October 2, 1830.

annexed to France. The moderate revolutionary ideas, the subsequent good work of Napoleonic centralisation in re-distributing the provinces, the introduction of the famous Code Napoléon, and the freedom of navigation of the Scheld, had had a great influence on Belgium, especially on its economic prosperity. Further, the equality of civic rights, as contrasted with the older sharp division of nobility and middle class, and the new religious liberty were of such far-reaching consequence in the economic and political life of every citizen that there was a very natural demand to make Belgium wholly French.

There was, at all events, a strong pro-French party, though it lost ground when the country felt the heavy penalties of conscription and the consequence of the continental blockade, and still more from the heavy burden which Napoleon's wars laid upon it. There remained, however, a strong remnant of the party, and, when, in 1815, the Belgians were forced into a single State, on grounds of general European policy, with a nation of different religion, race, and political genius, and the Dutch under William I oppressed the Belgians with their administration and taxation, eventually trying to force them to learn the Dutch tongue, the reaction led to a revival of the pro-French feeling. The burdens of the later years of Napoleon were forgotten. The secession-movement aimed not so much at obtaining independence as at incorporation in the new and progressive France.

In these circumstances the storm of the French Revolution was bound to have a particular effect upon Belgium, groaning, as it did, under a foreign yoke. The July days at Paris were followed by violent days at the end of August in Brussels. The rising in the capital closely resembled that at Paris.

The French party and those who advocated an independent monarchy had at first a common cause against

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Holland. It was not necessary to choose between them until the Revolution was accomplished. On the French side, naturally, everything was done to strengthen the pro-French party; but an alternative was provided in the event of the creation of a national monarchy, an idea which appealed to the majority of the Belgians. The Duc de Nemours, son of Louis Philippe, was to be the candidate. His duty would be, while observing outer forms and proceeding slowly, to bring Belgium entirely under French influence. He was, in fact, chosen as King at the Brussels Congress in February 1831.

The attitude of England in face of these events was of the first importance. England had made no very serious objection to the domination of Austria in the United Netherlands in the eighteenth century, because the power of Austria was too remote to contemplate at any time a menace to Great Britain from a part of the Continent which lay so close to the vital nerve of England. It was another matter if this part fell into the hands of the French. Once in possession of the east coast of the North Sea, it would dangerously fence in the whole south-east of England, as well as the metropolis, the chief seat of its commerce, and be able to control the whole of England's trade with the Continent. It was, therefore, just as important for England to check the French as it was to check Germany when it threatened to annex this region and take up a position of great power on the North Sea.

It was the Belgian question that had, above all others, driven England into the position of one of the most obstinate opponents of Napoleon and maintained it in almost unbroken warfare with France as long as Napoleon was in power. Napoleon knew how much it concerned England if he could secure Belgium for France, and this was one of the first things he promised on his return from Elba. At his fall, England pressed for the union of Holland and Belgium, not so much in order to have a watchman on

the northern frontier of France, as to interest a small and innocuous nation in the possession of Belgium and thus create a counterpoise against any return of French cupidity.

The Belgian Revolution reopened the whole question. It was a blow in the face to Legitimacy, to the sacredness of treaties, to the most treasured devices of Metternich and the Tsar. Prussia also was averse from violent changes. Why, then, should not England, which looked askance at a Revolution that was presumably in line with that of France, not take its stand on Legitimacy and prepare to enforce the treaties of 1815? Yet England declared for the independence of Belgium; and in doing so it made an exceedingly clever move, the consequences of which are still perceptible.

England could represent to the world that it stood for the rights of a small nation and put self-determination in the foreground; the more easily as the whole thing was in its own interest. The excessive centralisation which Holland sought and the great development of the mercantile marine of the new State were gradually found to be inconvenient to England. But two separate small States could not be so dangerous a rival to England as two united and economically prosperous provinces. No matter how badly they assorted in politics, religion, and national conscience, Holland and Belgium went excellently together as regards agriculture and industry. England had followed the political and religious conflicts of the two peoples with interest since 1815. It saw that, apart from the economic advantages, the unnatural amalgamation of two such different countries was bound to strengthen the pro-French feeling in Belgium, make it more amenable to French influence, and prove the precise opposite of the barrier to France which it was intended to be. England was bound to fear that, if it left Belgium politically linked to Holland, France would be hailed in it as the liberator.



The tinge of Liberalism which appeared in the English Ministry after the death of George IV was another factor. The plans of Polignac were known.<sup>1</sup> He had read a paper in the Council of Ministers in September 1829, in which Belgium was represented as desirable for France as far as the mouth of the Maas or the Scheld ; because it was necessary "to protect Paris against invasion."

His ideas culminated in a continental alliance against England, and the first clause of its programme was to be the freedom of the seas. The situation had now changed, it is true, but, whatever Government or political tendency came to power in France, the feeling in regard to Belgium was bound to be more or less the same. All this led to England's decision to give Belgium independence. The next question was to find the right man to put as head of the new State. To Metternich's great indignation England had already, in principle, laid down its independence at the London Conference on December 20th (1830). On no account was the Duc de Nemours to be chosen, in spite of the choice of him at Brussels. England let that be clearly understood at Paris. This implied, also, that the choice was not to be made by the Duc's father ; and, as an Englishman could not be selected, it must be an independent Prince. The man settled in Belgium must be strong enough to keep off all covetous continental neighbours.

Men's minds thus turned to Prince Leopold. From the Greek episode it was known that he would be no mere instrument of English policy on the Belgian throne. He would, as all knew, guard his independence against all encroachments. More than that, for the moment, England did not need.

To some extent, moreover, they counted on the fact that the Prince was half-English, on his relationship to the English Royal House and his friendship with nearly

<sup>1</sup> See Stockmar.

all the eminent men in England. From this they could hope for a bias in favour of England. There were, further, plenty of statesmen in England who wanted to see Prince Leopold out of England, because, in view of the age of the King and the tender years of the heiress, the Princess Victoria, it was always possible that there might be question of a Regency.<sup>1</sup> In fine, everybody knew the Prince's *penchant décidé* for a Throne, as the Austrian Baron von Wessenberg expressed it on a special commission of the London Conference, and sought to divert it elsewhere.

But the English were far-seeing. They did not intend to leave the man of their choice in such a situation, between the angry King of Holland and the disappointed Louis Philippe, that he would have to accomplish his work under very dangerous conditions. They, therefore, sought to ensure Leopold's Crown, so to say, by suggesting, through the Belgian Congress, an eventual engagement with a daughter of the French King.<sup>2</sup> Prince Leopold had long been in close relations with the Orléans family. Such a marriage might seem attractive to France, but it would in reality bind its hands in regard to the man who was to mount the Belgian Throne.

As long as Louis Philippe had some hope of his son securing the Throne, he opposed the marriage; but, when he realised England's unyielding resistance to the candidature of Nemours and saw that in case of war the outlook for France was very serious in face of the hostility of Austria, Russia, Prussia and England, he consented to consider at a later date the question of the eventual marriage of Prince Leopold and a Princess d'Orléans.

England's plan seemed to have succeeded in every

<sup>1</sup> Prince Esterhazy, Austrian Ambassador at London, to Metternich, January 14, 1831 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Gendebien, *Révélations historiques sur la révolution de 1830*, p. 78.

respect, and the next thing was to carry it out. Belgium had little to do with the choice of a King. It had chosen the Duc de Nemours, and England had thwarted its choice. All that was done in favour of Prince Leopold was done by England ; for Austria, Russia and Prussia were opposed to change, though Prussia did not press the principle very warmly. The very strong position of England had recently become clear to all. There had been incidents which seemed to menace the structure—the opposition of William I of Holland, his campaign against Belgium in August 1831, and the subsequent French intervention—but the strong hand of England triumphed over these, and lifted Prince Leopold to his tottering Throne.

King Leopold himself, who made his entry into Brussels on July 21, 1831, was quite clear about his own part and that of England. When he wrote to Metternich in 1832, to get certain concessions from him for his country, he said plainly :

I have been sent here to prevent Belgium, either wholly or in part, falling again into the hands of the French. To ensure this in the future, the means of existence must not be cut off from Belgium while it is burdened with the debt of a neighbouring country. All the Powers, not excepting Russia, are interested in seeing Belgium independent and prosperous, because in that case—and it is the case so far—there is no question of it becoming French. Yet they turn its independence into a grievance, to such an extent that it cannot continue.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand Leopold was sagacious enough to understand that the Dutch King would never be reconciled to a solution which deprived him of Belgium in spite of the attested right of 1815 ; the more so as Russia and Austria especially, but Prussia also, by no means favoured this secession in virtue of the will of the people, which England and France had, for different reasons, sanctioned.

When Belgian affairs came to a crisis, Metternich,

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Metternich, July 25, 1832 (State Archives).

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who understood them least, wrote in regard to the war that had broken out between Holland and Belgium, that the fault lay chiefly with France, and then with the Liberalism which was the basis of English policy and represented a system of revolutionary co-partnership.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of all its Liberal sympathies [the Chancellor says in his Memoir on the Belgian question], England has displayed a certain jealousy in regard to France, and this reawakens as soon as certain material English interests come into play. The starting-point of the Belgian question depends entirely on wretched revolutionary grounds. England is to blame for letting it arise at all.<sup>2</sup>

These and similar observations of the leading Minister of a country that was then so powerful on the Continent always came in some form to the knowledge of the Dutch King, and strengthened his attitude. He never recognised either the first draft of the resolutions of the London Conference, in eighteen articles, regarding the separation of Belgium, nor the Treaty of November 15, 1831, which was more favourable to Belgium, and was concluded after the Dutch War and the intervention of France. Until his death in 1839 he never signed it. Leopold, the natural enemy of King William from force of circumstances, could to some extent understand his position, and he gave his opinion in a letter to Metternich :

It becomes clearer every day that King William would like to have Belgium once more, and that this is the aim of his personal political action. I think that it is quite natural. But, while it would have been easy for him to *keep* it by reasonable treatment, it would now be just as difficult for him and his family to regain it, and hold it against the *resolute will of the people*.<sup>3</sup>

When the French were summoned by Leopold to help the inadequately organised Belgian Army against a Dutch attack, the spectre was conjured up once more before the

<sup>1</sup> Metternich to Prince Esterhazy, August 24, 1831 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Metternich's Mémoire on the Belgian question, January 18, 1832 (State Archives).

<sup>3</sup> Letter of September 20, 1832, in the State Archives.



mind of England. It was feared that the French, who besieged Antwerp, would not leave the country. Palmerston and Grey brought heavy and menacing pressure to bear upon France to compel it to withdraw its troops. England was not deceived in Leopold. He had summoned the French in case of need against the Dutch, but he now saw that they threatened his independence, and certainly had not wished them to remain when the work was done. Hence at the beginning of September 1831, King Leopold, at one with England, pressed Louis Philippe to evacuate the region occupied. After the success of the Dutch it was felt that some concession must be made to King William's point of view. The twenty-four new articles drawn up, ceding parts of Limburg and Luxemburg to Holland, represented a long step in this direction. When France realised the threatening attitude of England, which was shown by Palmerston's policy, Talleyrand tried to secure a division of Belgium between France, Holland, and Prussia, leaving Antwerp a free port. But Prussia, which adhered to Holland, raised Legitimist objections to France and its enlargement, which meant an approach toward the Rhine, and would not yield even when certain advantages were offered to it, at once betrayed the plan to Palmerston. He immediately threatened France with war if she did not evacuate Belgium.

William of Holland, however, had no idea of accepting the resolutions of the London Conference—especially after his victorious campaign in Belgium—although they more or less favoured him. In London the resolutions had been declared final and unalterable by the middle of October, and thus part of Luxemburg had been awarded to the Germans and the right bank of the Maas in Limburg to Holland. This solution satisfied nobody. Leopold, who for a moment contemplated abdication, was indignant at this speedy departure from the promises made to him ;

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and to William, who demanded the return of the country, this concession was merely like a drop of water on a hot stove. However, Leopold and the Belgian Chamber consented at length, and the Belgian King, who continued to feel the menace of the Dutch King, redoubled his efforts to come to an understanding with France which should allay its appetite for Belgian territory, and at the same time give Leopold security and assistance against the north. Hence the project of marrying a daughter of Louis Philippe.

In order to realise this plan, against grave opposition in France, where it was felt that it meant a surrender of all ideas of annexing Belgium, it was bound to be Leopold's policy to keep on particularly good terms with the French, in order to induce Louis Philippe to carry out the understanding—a conditional understanding, it is true—of an earlier date. An opportunity was found in the growing desire of the French for the abolition of the Barrier—the line of fortresses built in 1815, at England's request, along the Franco-Belgian frontier. France wanted them abolished. Wellington, the author of the plan and a warm defender of it, and England wished to maintain them as far as possible. The matter was the more difficult because, at the time of the intervention of the French in Belgium, when it was occupied by French troops, Leopold had refused a special convention on the subject of the forts, but had explained to Louis Philippe that as soon as possible five forts would be destroyed, in agreement with the four Powers which had caused them to be built.

King Leopold was between two fires. The mission of the Belgian General Goblet to London at last ended in a compromise. Five forts were destroyed in deference to France, but the French did not get all they wanted. At the same time there were complaints in the House of Commons about the number of French officers employed in the Belgian Army. It was very difficult for Leopold.

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On account of England's opposition he had not been able entirely to satisfy France on the fortress question, and he saw his hopes deferred more and more on account of the feeling in France.

Yet England's position was at that time too powerful for France, in spite of its new dynasty by the grace of the people, to face the conqueror of 1815 once more. England had not only suffered comparatively little, but had made immense gains of territory and money. In the long run it had always to yield to England's sword and England's power, because it was completely isolated on the Continent. To the Austrians, Russians and Prussians it was a despicable revolutionary element which no one would have assisted if it had been drawn into war on account of Belgium, which was equally revolutionary in the eyes of the "maintaining Powers." Thus the resignation of the French Premier and Cabinet furthered Leopold's plans, and Paris began to consider the project of a marriage.

Leopold had meditated much on the contemplated union with a daughter of Louis Philippe, which England had devised at once as a concession to, and a bond upon, France. Like the English statesmen, he told himself that the marriage would afford him security against the French desire to annex; but he also saw in the connection with the Royal House of France a possible support against English interference, in case the English became too exacting and restricted his liberty of action. King Leopold's diplomatic faculty aimed at securing a really independent position by, according to the need of the hour, playing England against France or France against England.

This idea was well known in England, but could not very well be assailed. The attitude of reserve of Palmerston and the other English Ministers toward the Belgian King was as much due to the fear that, by the

accession to the throne of his niece, he might obtain a considerable influence on English affairs as to a certain apprehension lest, in his sense of independence, he might drift too far away from English interests.

The King's efforts in regard to the new marriage at last, in the beginning of June, won the consent of the French Court. The last difficulties were removed during a visit which he paid to Paris in the latter part of May. By perseverance he had won a great diplomatic victory and won a new support for his throne. The marriage took place on August 9, 1832.

Leopold had no sooner secured his kingdom from attack from the south in this way but he began to conciliate the sullen Powers to the east, to reconcile them to the establishment of the Belgian State and bring them into diplomatic relations with it. His first care was to win Austria, then the greatest Power on the Continent, and Metternich. The friendships which the King had contracted in the later years of Napoleon and during the Vienna Congress now became profitable.

In a long personal letter to the Austrian Chancellor he tried to put in the best light his new little Kingdom and what had occurred in it, and to refute what he called the "very unfavourable, indeed I may say, quite false accounts of Belgium," which the Emperor and the Chancellor had received :

I can only rejoice that I have restored monarchical and religious order in these beautiful provinces, indeed better and *more completely* than in many of the older States. A number of Courts have believed that Belgium could easily have been brought to reunite with Holland. Any honest agent will tell you that this would have been extremely difficult. The bitterness on both sides is much too great. There is, moreover, the Catholic Church and the happy position in which it finds itself there. That is one reason why the Church is deeply concerned for the independence of the country, and is ready to make material sacrifices to remain Belgian. Even the Emperor Joseph had more than one conflict with this Catholicism. King William tried to undermine it, but this did him more harm than



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if he had directly attacked it. In spite of the blockade of the Meuse, which is against the Treaty of Vienna, and the precarious condition of Antwerp, trade and industry have made great advances. The country is as quiet and good as possible. When recently I was away for a whole week, there was not the *smallest disturbance*, although a number of the French had come in, for purposes which have since clearly transpired. Nothing could be more striking than the difference between France and Belgium: here religion exercises a beneficent influence. There is not the least trace of Republicanism.<sup>1</sup>

King Leopold was acquainted with Metternich, and knew where to look for his weak side. Hence the emphasis on the monarchical sentiments of the Belgians and the attempt to represent his Throne as legitimate. He thus trusted to get the "Interdict," as he called it, which the Eastern Powers more or less laid upon Belgium, removed. He continued:

Belgium exists. A small and flourishing country, it may, under the protection of its neutrality, form a useful partition between its neighbours. Certainly it should be the policy of the Courts to do nothing that might endanger its independence to the advantage of a neighbouring State, if not destroy it.

When later, it became possible to appoint a Belgian Ambassador, Baron von Loe, at Vienna, he was presented to Metternich by King Leopold with the words: "I commend Baron Loe to your protection. He has nothing in common with the Revolution, or any revolutions, and will always be only the envoy of his master." This was the way which the King thought best for conciliating Metternich, and through him Austria. At the same time he was meeting Metternich's express wish. The Chancellor had written him on June 23, 1832, that he should direct his envoy in Vienna to "go slowly and give no one occasion to regard him as a representative of revolution."<sup>2</sup>

Simultaneously the King tried to conciliate Prussia, which was not only affronted as signatory of the Treaty

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Metternich, from Brussels, June 11, 1832 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Metternich to King Leopold, June 23, 1832 (State Archives).

of 1815, by the detachment of Belgium, but felt insulted in the person of its monarch, a brother-in-law of the King of Holland. Here again the King was successful. Prince William of Prussia came to terms with Metternich, and in April 1832 the two Powers ratified the twenty-four articles of November 15th. The King of Prussia, however, did not omit to press Leopold, in a letter, to make some sacrifice to the monarch upon whom "the whole affair had laid so many and, he might say, such cruel sacrifices."<sup>1</sup>

Russia alone, which was busy repressing the Polish insurrection, and saw in it a natural consequence of the French and Belgian Revolution, stood aside. The Tsar would hear nothing about the new Belgian Throne, and was embittered over the change of dynasty at Paris. Here also family sentiments played a great part, as the Prince of Orange was the Tsar's brother-in-law. It was out of consideration for the Dutch Royal Family that the Tsar had refused to ratify the November Treaty.

Meantime the London Conference had proceeded, and had tried to settle the numerous territorial disputes between Holland and Belgium in a series of protocols. King Leopold, who feared that in the end they might ask further sacrifices of him, spoke very irritably about the assembled diplomatists. He wrote to Metternich:

The resolutions of the Conference are like the movements of an endless screw. It is a pity, as all Europe is laughing, and I should have liked to see more *respect* for, and *fear* of, the tribunal. This is impossible when 69 protocols are written about a matter, and they leave it pretty much as it was.<sup>2</sup>

But the influence of the King's marriage was felt at the Conference. Whereas in England in August 1831, the first French intervention in Belgium had been regarded

<sup>1</sup> King Frederick William III to King Leopold on July 5, 1832 (State Archives); copy of letter of King Leopold to Metternich enclosed.

<sup>2</sup> In letter of July 25th, already quoted.

with the greatest misgiving, and the withdrawal of the French troops had been demanded with a thinly veiled threat of war, there was now, in face of the refusal of the Dutch King to recognise the decisions of the Conference, a proposal to use concerted Anglo-French action by land and water to enforce respect for the Conference. England believed that Louis Philippe could not now interfere with the independence of his own son-in-law, especially as he knew well, from the first intervention, what the effect would be in England. The English thought, moreover, that the French would return to their country as speedily as possible after the recovery of Antwerp, which was almost entirely delivered from the Dutch on the last day of 1832. The two Powers were as distrustful of each other, and wary, on the Belgian question as on all other occasions. Metternich was right when he wrote to King Leopold :

Your Majesty has still a very grave task ; but the issue of it is written rather in the fate of France and England than in that of Belgium itself.<sup>1</sup>

William I, however, continued to refuse to recognise, in fact, the decisions of the London Conference. He declined to give up two of the Antwerp forts which his troops still held, though the Conference ordered their surrender. Leopold, accordingly, retained the sections of Limburg and Luxemburg which were to go to Holland : a delicate situation that lasted until 1839, and gave a great deal of anxiety.

On the whole, nevertheless, the second evacuation by the French at the close of 1832 enabled the new State to proceed peacefully with its development. It did not, however, owe its independence to France, but to England—granting that England acted in its own interest. Seignobos is wrong when he says : “ The independence

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Baden, August 21, 1832 (State Archives).

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of Belgium was proclaimed in principle by the insurgent Belgians and realised as a fact through France.”<sup>1</sup> No, it was realised by England in spite of France. France yielded to the inevitable, and sought by consenting to the marriage with Louis Philippe’s daughter, to save whatever influence it could in Belgium; while England consented with the afterthought which we have noticed. Leopold’s accession was due to the balanced influences of England and France. The independence of Belgium was based, and is still based, upon them.

<sup>1</sup> *Politische Geschichte des modernen Europa*, p. 212.



## *Chapter IV*

### *THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE KINGDOM*

**A**LTHOUGH THE Eastern Powers in the Spring of 1832 ratified the Treaty of November 15, 1831, after much hesitation, especially on the part of Russia, the prejudices against Belgium continued at the Courts of all three Powers. The Kingdom "by the grace of the people," with a Constitution founded upon the principle of the derivation of all power from the people, could not hope to win the support of Metternich or of the ruler of all the Russias.

Austria, in view of the strictly Legitimist principles of the Chancellor, had reluctantly yielded only because it did not care to face the prospect of a war over Belgium, with a possibility of disturbing that peace of Europe which Metternich so jealously guarded. Prussia's hesitation was due to the family connection of Frederick William III with the Dutch Throne, not by Legitimist sentiments ; but the King's love of peace had overruled his feelings. Peace was desired by both Prussia and Russia because it was feared that in the event of a European conflagration, Poland would break out once more. This led to an agreement of the leading Prussian statesmen with the ideas of Metternich. Leopold, in spite of his personal relations with Metternich, found him cold—indeed, frosty—in all his communications.

However, it was the supreme aim of the King to be on

good terms with Austria, and he acted as if he perceived nothing; the relations with Austria must be maintained at any price. But Metternich had taken care that Austria should be represented at Brussels by a man who was a standing expression of his dislike of the new illegitimate Throne—Count Dietrichstein, the Ambassador, an ultra-Conservative. He was an embodiment of Metternich's system of Legitimacy and pure culture, with a warm personal hatred, not merely of the revolutionary tendency, but of all new Liberal ideas. His own idiosyncrasies were accentuated by the instruction which Metternich had given him.<sup>1</sup>

The Chancellor acknowledges that there was a certain unity, *un centre d'entente*, amongst the three Conservative Powers in regard to the Belgian question, but Dietrichstein is to keep it strictly secret. He enjoins the Count to be a neutral observer, it is true, and take no active part in politics, but tells him to watch carefully that revolutionary tendencies, even in the guise of religion, do not enter, in view of the proximity of that "focus of revolutionary fraction" (France). He says of the position of King Leopold and his State between England and France that for the moment the two States have parallel interests in the creation of Belgium. But it seems to him that they will "shortly" diverge, and each of the two will try to secure a preponderant influence in Belgium at the expense of the other. "Which," the instruction concludes, "will have the preponderant influence when the inevitable conflict comes? It is of particular interest to us to know that, and you will pay special attention to it."

The other representatives of the Powers at Brussels also played a great part in the life of the King and the new State. The French Ambassador, Count Latour-Maubourg, of a family devoted to the Orléans, and, there-

<sup>1</sup> "Antrittsinstruktion Metternichs an Graf Dietrichstein, June 21, 1833" (in the State Archives).

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fore, a thorn in Metternich's side, was reputed to hold Liberal opinions. It was otherwise with Adair, the English Ambassador. He had once been a Whig, but had returned to Conservatism. Von Arnim, the Prussian Ambassador, co-operated with Count Dietrichstein in most matters ; and the Count did not maintain the neutral attitude recommended to him. He refused, for instance, to attend the September Festival in 1834, the annual commemoration of the outcome of the Revolution and the separation from Holland, because, as he wrote to Metternich : " I will have no part in festivities in honour of a Revolution which robbed His Dutch Majesty of part of his Kingdom."

He made no secret of his sympathy with the pro-Orange opposition, the bitterest enemies of King Leopold ; and he thus put difficulties in the way of the consolidation of the country, which was hard enough in the early years. He even put little restraint on his tongue, on one occasion making a remark about a Belgian Ministry which caused serious trouble, and led King Leopold to ask Metternich to relieve the Count for a time and use a moderating influence on him. Metternich, who more than agreed with the Ambassador's political views, did not relieve him, but he warned him. " Take," he said, " the advice of a man who during a career of almost two generations has *never been in the position of having to recall a single word he ever spoke*, nor in a situation in which he needed to express his thoughts otherwise than they were."<sup>1</sup> One can realise how the work of consolidation was hampered by such Ambassadors.

Catholics and Liberals had co-operated in severing the country from Holland. Once that object was accomplished, however, their ways parted ; though amongst the Catholics there was a wing that leaned to the ideas of de Lamennais. Metternich, in a letter to the King,

<sup>1</sup> Letter of May 25, 1840, in the State Archives.

called de Lamennais an "ambitious fool" who "wanted to use Belgium as the fulcrum of his anti-social revolutionary lever."

The Constitution drafted by the National Assembly created a constitutional monarchy, but of a decided democratic complexion. King Leopold could not but see that a large part of those who had voted for monarchical Government had done so only in the belief that the majority of the Powers, certainly the three Eastern Powers, and possibly England and France, would not tolerate a Republic. King Leopold once said to Count Dietrichstein that he hoped to secure modifications of the Constitution, as "the State was in reality a republic with the shades of monarchical forms,"<sup>1</sup> but this was merely meant for the ear of the Ambassador and Metternich. Leopold had adopted Liberal and progressive Whig ideas in England. He had his own ideas about politics and statecraft, and he freely gave liberty to others, only keeping control in his own hands to the extent of checking excessive partisanship or anarchistic tendencies.

To Count Dietrichstein such ideas were torture. He had once described the unity of the two great political parties at the time of the Revolution as "the monstrous alliance of Catholicism and Jacobinism brought about by the faults of the Dutch Government." The tree of freedom planted under the windows of the Royal Palace, and hung with "tricolour rags," to remind the King (he said) constantly of the origin of his Throne, was an abomination to him.

Although the King tried hard to win every social class to his Kingdom and his Crown, he did not entirely succeed in the early years of his reign. Part of the aristocracy, especially, which had been very privileged under the Dutch regime, and felt itself lowered in the new age of freedom

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Dietrichstein to Metternich, December 1, 1833 (State Archives).



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and popular rights, gave him much trouble.<sup>1</sup> The Belgian people rightly felt that the behaviour of these nobles in regard to the King and the new State was directed against their liberties.

When, in March 1834, the horses of the former household of the Prince of Orange, including the one he had ridden at Waterloo, had to be sold by auction, and the pro-Orange aristocrats got up a subscription to buy them and present them to the Prince, the people were very angry with the most prominent nobles. On April 3 and 4 their houses were sacked by crowds. Accurate lists of the names of the adherents of the Prince of Orange were circulated, and by speeches and writings the people were egged on against the Dutch. The Ministry and Court did not take up a very energetic attitude in face of these events. They were grist to their mill. This made Count Dietrichstein, who was directed to be neutral, more excited than ever. When he heard of the riots, he hastened to the Palace, to rouse the King and his Ministers out of what he called their "disgraceful lethargy."

The Belgian Ministry [he wrote privately to Metternich] is the accomplice and the plaything of the anarchist movement. When I went to the King, during the disorders, I found the President of the Chamber, de Mérode, there, and said to him: "As I am accredited to the Belgian Government, may I ask where it is, for I see nothing but anarchy?"<sup>2</sup>

When the King tried to soothe the ruffled diplomatist, and said that order would be restored, but it would take time, as the outbreak was a symptom of the *indignation nationale*, Dietrichstein could find only words of the bitterest criticism, in his letter to Metternich, for the King's person and conduct.

But the Count's chief was also influenced from another

<sup>1</sup> To this section belonged the d'Ursels, the Trazegniers, the Lignes, the Lalaings, and others.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Metternich, April 7, 1834 (State Archives).

quarter against the King. The Prince de Ligne, whose house had been the first to suffer from the crowds, and of whom Dietrichstein himself said that he "had not inherited the spirit of his grandfather," complained bitterly to the Chancellor about his experiences. "The General Marquis de Chasteler," he wrote, "the King's Master of the Stables, declared that he would have the horse which the Prince [of Orange] rode in the glorious battle of Waterloo bought, and would put it in a dung-cart."<sup>1</sup> The Prince accused the King of having himself incited the looting and destruction. "The ruler of this country," he said, "is nothing but a standard-bearer of anarchy, a shield for its propaganda; his kingdom is a nest of intrigue and of conspiracy against the peace of Europe."

The Prince's vindictive feelings went so far as to completely misrepresent King Leopold's sober, quiet, and superior sense, which at the time sought only to reconcile the native population as smoothly as possible to the new order and further its economic development, and to get his new kingdom recognised by the other European States. But reports which made a deep impression on Metternich, with his fine ear for rumours of revolution, were always more or less successful. They were no inconsiderable obstacle in the way of the King's efforts to place his rule upon a solid foundation.

After the Orangeists, it was the Radical section of the Catholics who gave the King most trouble, and caused him to seek assistance in the Catholic power of Austria, and through Austria, in the Pope. The King, who naturally was not aware of the full asperity of the complaints of Dietrichstein and de Ligne to Metternich, turned in this question to the Austrian Chancellor for help against the unruly Catholic elements. The majority of the Catholics were faithful to the monarchist principle, but the minority, under the lead of a few ambitious priests,

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Metternich, May 6, 1834 (State Archives).

wanted almost no Government, and thought that their influence on the people was sufficient. "On that ground," the King wrote to Metternich, "they want to make our very advanced Constitution even more Liberal, in order to place all power in the hands of Parliament."

King Leopold, while fully disposed to grant the people their rights, energetically opposed the Radical elements which would deprive him of power. He spoke to Metternich of the very grave danger of men like Dubus and Dumortin, the "violent and wicked men" who got Radical priests elected to the Chamber, and asked Metternich to secure that no bishop should be nominated without previously consulting him, as the bishops of Tournai and Ghent were the soul of the movement.<sup>1</sup> In 1835 Metternich had, at the King's request, secured the appointment of Monsignore Gizzi as Papal Nuncio at Brussels.

But, while King Leopold had asked the nomination of Gizzi only in order to check the Radical clergy, Metternich had, in conjunction with the Holy See, a double aim. He explained it to Dietrichstein by saying that the presence of the Monsignore in Brussels was "directed not only against the religious revolutionary movement, but against fanatics of every sort."<sup>2</sup>

Here was another spy for Metternich upon the too Liberal and democratic institutions of the revolution-born country. He responded to the King's appeal for help, and at the same time provided himself with a new agent in Leopold's capital. Apart from this, however, Leopold generally succeeded in making the majority of his people happy and contented, and he promoted their economic development in every way. As industry advanced, and individual prosperity increased, the King gained more and more sympathy.

The misfortune which the King experienced in the death

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Metternich, February 17, 1836 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Dietrichstein, June 17, 1835 (State Archives).



LEOPOLD AND PRINCESS CHARLOTTE AT THE OPERA  
IN LONDON, 1816





of his first son on May 16, 1834, led to a rebirth of the ambition of the French. The King contemplated nominating his nephew, the third son of Ferdinand of Coburg, as his successor, and Sir Robert Adair, the English Ambassador, did all in his power to confirm this, as he saw in it a guarantee against French intrigue. But the birth of a second son in 1835 happily ended this concern, and King and nation were overjoyed to find the succession assured. The event, and the continuous progress of the country, delighted the King. His letters at the time reflect this feeling; though they show, also, that he was in no hurry to part with the reins of Government. The people was to have its just liberties, and to *believe* that it had a large share in the Government. In reality the shrewd monarch kept the power in his own hands; and, in virtue of his sober ideals, his personal gifts, and his world-wide connections, he was the best man to do so. To the Archduke John, in correspondence with whom it was not necessary to be as careful as with the ultra-reactionary Metternich, he wrote:

My Lower House bothers me at times with a mania for restricting the Royal power within the *lois organiques*. As a rule, however, with a little patience we win. The modern French say "*le roi règne, mais il ne doit pas gouverner*." I, in my smaller sphere, think it is necessary for him to do both.<sup>1</sup>

The King was extremely pleased with the situation in 1835 and 1836, though the taxes were much lower than they had been under the Dutch: a shrewd move to conciliate the people. In spite of the fact that the Army was, as the King himself said, "far too large," the finances were in excellent condition. The Budget was balanced. Even an old Republican of 1793, who represented Philippville in the Chamber, said in February 1836 that "there was too much personal prosperity

<sup>1</sup> Letter of April 12, 1835, in the Meran Archives.

## THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE KINGDOM

and comfort in Belgium to offer any hope of a new revolution.”<sup>1</sup>

As soon as the King felt the ground firm under his feet at home, he began to seek for it a corresponding regard abroad especially by exploiting his personal connections, offering his personal counsel, and using his political position as intermediary between the Powers. He felt that the prosperity of his people and his own welfare were bound up with peace on the Continent; but the difficulties of intervening were very great. He wrote to the Archduke :

In France as well as in England I do all I can to prevent mischief, but the chief enemies one has to fight are people's *passions*. Often they will not have what is to their interest, because they want what suits their *thirst for vengeance*, their *hatred*.

He knew that, if there were a great European conflagration, Belgium would be in it. It would become an apple of discord between the Powers, and would not be able to avoid being drawn into war. He knew that the King of Holland was only waiting for the outbreak of a general war to get back Belgium : to say nothing of other dangers and aspirations on the part of the Powers. To the Archduke he wrote :

I use in this sense all the political influence which circumstances give me. I try to reconcile and unite, while others—my uncle Cumberland, for instance—go round fanning the flames everywhere. There is an old English proverb, “ Fire is a good servant, but a bad master.” That is how war looks to me. A war to defend one's frontiers is just, but *lightly to open the sluices of a great European war would, I am confident, lead to frightful revolutions*.<sup>2</sup>

The high policy of that time was to a great extent the family policy of the monarchs; and this was, perhaps, nowhere more marked than in the case of the Coburg House, for which Leopold won an undreamed-of importance in the political life of Europe. Already closely connected

<sup>1</sup> King Leopold to Metternich, February 16, 1836 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Letter of February 18, 1836, in the Meran Archives.

with England, especially as uncle to the heiress to the Throne, and with France, as son-in-law of Louis Philippe, he sought in 1836 to extend his connections to the Iberian Peninsula. He conceived the idea of marrying his nephew, Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Koháry, to Donna Maria II, Queen of Portugal.

He wished also to have a word in Spanish affairs, where he followed the struggle of Christinos and Carlists with a secret sympathy for the Queen. On the side of Queen Maria Christina, fourth spouse of King Ferdinand, who had in 1830 carried the Pragmatic Sanction in favour of her daughter Isabella, were France, England, the Queen of Portugal, and all progressively minded people in Europe. Don Carlos, the younger brother of King Ferdinand, had on his side the Conservative and Legitimist Powers. King Leopold allowed a plan of forming a regiment to be drafted in his country, in support of the young Queen of Spain. The Eastern Powers, hearing of it, hastened to check this beginning on the part of a little country which each of the larger States regarded as a ward. Austria, always ready to espouse Legitimist interests, took the lead, and instructed its representative on June 20, 1835, to leave Belgium, if the Government did not refuse to sanction this act. "For," Metternich wrote to Dietrichstein, "the enlistment would mean that Belgium was assisting the Revolution which has taken refuge in Spain under the banner of Queen Christina. It would make Belgium an accomplice of revolutionary measures that might be taken in other countries, and would end in making the country the arsenal of all the agitators and disturbers of the peace of Europe."<sup>1</sup>

King Leopold, who acted on a secret understanding with England and France and Queen Maria da Gloria, with the object of helping Queen Christina as far as possible, withdrew from actual military support, and refused

<sup>1</sup> Letter of June 20, 1835, in the State Archives.



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permission, as Metternich asked. On April 9, 1836, the King's plan to marry his nephew to the Queen of Portugal was realised. In view, however, of the difficulties which the Queen encountered in her own country, the marriage really brought the King more trouble than influence ; for the disorders in Portugal compelled him in the following years repeatedly to request England to help the Royal pair against the extreme Liberals.

Nevertheless, the two counsellors, Van der Weyer, and later, General Goblet, whom he sent to his nephew as Ambassadors, kept him well informed about the situation in the Peninsula, so that he clearly understood the conditions in Portugal and the disorder in Spain. This information, and the different policy pursued by England and Austria, respectively, in Spanish affairs, gave Leopold, who possibly laid too much stress on his friendship with Archduke John, and certainly over-estimated his relations with Metternich, a new opportunity to pose as mediator between the Great Powers in their differences. We have already seen that Metternich was really not cordially disposed toward King Leopold and his rule and State ; but he never quite broke off relations with him, as he had a regard for Leopold's far-reaching connections. In particular, he trusted through Leopold to acquire an influence on Princess Victoria when she ascended the Throne.

So the correspondence between the King and the Chancellor continued. Indeed, as time went on, the letters became more frequent and earnest ; though Dietrichstein did his best to keep Metternich distrustful and sceptical as regards Belgium.

Leopold, who saw with some concern the increasing antagonism of the Liberal Powers of the West and the Conservative Powers of the East, which might lead to war, and Belgium might be drawn into the whirlpool, naturally tried to assist England in its efforts at conciliation. He

wrote to his brother, the reigning Duke Ernest at Coburg, asking him to propose to Metternich that Austria also should play a mediating part between East and West. It is clear that he acted at the suggestion of Peel, who did not think that too intimate a connection of Austria and Russia was good for England. It was England's wish from that time onward that Austria and Russia should hold each other in check in the East, especially in the Balkans. This would prevent either of them from attaining a preponderant influence in Eastern affairs.

Leopold, therefore, observed, in his indirect communication to Metternich, that, if Austria were completely isolated from England, it would in time become "an ally of Russia after the manner of the Sultan"—a vassal State more or less carrying out the commands of Russia.<sup>1</sup> The King hastened to say that, in his desire to see a *rapprochement* of Austria and England, "there was no feeling whatever of hostility to Russia." He was for peace and mediation only. He repeated that he "*could and would* help to bring about this *rapprochement*." The emphasis was on the word "could," which the King himself underlined; and it shows clearly that he had an understanding, to say the least, with the British Government. Austria replied, however, that there was no hope of mediating between Liberalism and Legitimism, when such a request was addressed to Metternich, the most fanatical and inflexible representative of the Legitimist and Conservative policy.

His reply to the King was very characteristic of the Chancellor. In the moralising, pedagogical tone which he used even to Kings, as if he lived in a higher atmosphere than the rest of men, Metternich analyses the situation, and says that it is a question of a conflict of the principle of conserving the actual and the principle of destroying it. The latter might go on with its work under the shield of reform, sovereignty of the people, Liberalism,

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Duke Ernest, June 4, 1835 (extract in the State Archives).

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Radicalism, or humanity—"these various weapons of one and the same army."<sup>1</sup>

Shrinking from the ultra-Radicalism—now called Bolshevism, but an old acquaintance of the time of the French Revolution—the cruel excesses of which had once indelibly stamped themselves upon the Chancellor's mind, fearing for the great State entrusted to his administration, he clung anxiously to tradition. He would preserve the actual, without making any allowance for national development and progress. He was bound to decline Leopold's proposal, for, as he said, "the two forces are naturally hostile, destructive of each other, they may conclude an armistice, but never peace!" This was, he said, his "creed," and he would never abandon it.<sup>2</sup>

The efforts of King Leopold to draw Austria somewhat into the camp of the Liberal Western Powers referred to its relations with France as well as England. He had an idea of bringing Austria nearer to France by a marriage of one of the sons of Louis Philippe to an Austrian Archduchess. He had in mind the Archduchess Therese, daughter of the Archduke Karl. Remembering his friendship with Archduke John, he wrote him a letter asking him to sound cautiously the disposition of the Austrian Court in regard to such a marriage. The Archduke was sceptical, but he made inquiries, and replied to the King that, while he could say nothing decisive without the authority of Metternich, there seemed to be little prospect of success. It was, he said, the feeling in Vienna, in view of the fate of Marie Antoinette and Marie Louise, that an Austrian Princess would always be unhappy in France, and would not be a *persona grata* to the French people. The principle of Legitimacy was, he said—and there was Metternich behind this—an obstacle, seeing that Louis Philippe owed his throne to the hated Revolution.

<sup>1</sup> Metternich to Duke Ernest, June 11, 1835 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> The same letter.

On the other hand, it is clear from the entries in the Archduke's diary that he personally regarded the marriage as desirable. After long reflection on the ancient Bourbon branch and its chances of returning to the Throne, he wrote :

Louis Philippe and his family are there, and there is nothing against a marriage. On the contrary, in view of the ambition of Russia and its purely Oriental and Absolutist principles of government, there is much to be said in favour of a union of Austria with France, as this would also ensure peace in Italy. It would be best, of course, to have an intimate union of Austria and Prussia, and Germany and Italy also, that would check both East and West, and all that is possible should be done to secure this ; yet it would be advisable for the West to be well disposed toward this alliance. Of the East, which gives us nothing, and has nothing to give but dependence, barbarism, and arbitrariness, I do not want to hear anything. I regard the union with this State as one of the necessary evils when the better cannot be had.<sup>1</sup>

The Archduke considered that the Archduchess Therese was unsuitable for France on account of her simple, gentle, and yielding character. France demanded qualities which her childlike German soul would not supply. He goes on :

There is, moreover, much to be overcome—the prejudice of the nation against Austrian Princesses, who always brought misfortune, the unstable condition of the Government, the restless parties, the possibility of a change, which would involve even the poorest. All that has to be taken into account. There are only three members of our family who would regard the matter quietly, without prejudice : Karl, who would have to look after his daughter, Joseph [his elder brother], and I. The others, especially the women, need not be considered. The widowed Empress thinks of nothing but the Legitimacy of Henry V [grandson of Charles X of France], and says, “God forbid such an engagement !” The young Empress says the same. Sophie [the wife of Archduke Francis Charles] hears only what is said by old dames of the ultra stamp, and damns everything about Louis Philippe. Rainer [his younger brother] says “God forbid !” Marie [Rainer's wife] and Louis [a younger brother] the same. One ought to hear them. On their Legitimist principles they exalt Don Miguel, though he committed perjury !!!

<sup>1</sup> Entry in Diary, June 3, 1836 (Meran Archives).



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What can come of it, when Metternich and all the ladies and ultras are against it? Austria is divided, and I do not know if there may not be very many for it. I regard it as over—it will not take place. I am waiting for Metternich's reply, to understand it properly.

He had not long to wait for the reply.<sup>1</sup> It said curtly and floridly that there was no question of the marriage. The *établissement* was not secure. The fate of the July Throne was as yet in the sealed book of history. The engagement of an Austrian Princess to a dynasty born of a revolution was impossible, as the fate of Marie Antoinette and the Empress Marie Louise was still too fresh in the memory.

Thus Leopold's attempt to bring about closer relations between Austria and the Western Powers by matrimonial connections was wrecked by the stubbornness of Metternich, who would not budge an inch from his principles. The Chancellor could not be moved, although the new dangers in the East, owing to Russia's designs on Turkey, threatened to put Austria in a difficult position.

Mehemed Ali, the rebellious governor of Egypt, had demanded, and practically obtained, Syria after his victories over the troops of Sultan Mahmud, and the assistance offered to Turkey by Russia had had to be refused under pressure from the jealous Western Powers, England and France. The secret Treaty of Hunkiar-Iskelessi, which was then concluded between Russia and Turkey, represented, on the face of it, a mutual "alliance for offence and defence," but in reality it was very one-sided. A secret article closed the Dardanelles against the Western Powers in certain contingencies, though it was to be always open to Russia. This materially increased the antagonism of East and West.

Although Austria had at least just as much reason as the Western Powers to distrust Russia, Metternich's

<sup>1</sup> Metternich to Archduke John, June 8, 1836 (Meran Archives).

objections to the Liberal revolutionary ideas of the West isolated it, and the Chancellor accepted even the Russo-Turkish Treaty. There had, however, already been misunderstandings between England and France, which had hitherto been at one on the Eastern question, and these had been openly expressed in the retirement of Talleyrand, who despaired of the formal alliance he desired to see, from the London Embassy. In view of the unveiled hostility of Russia and the incipient estrangement from France, especially on the question of Syria and the French sympathy with Mehemed Ali, Palmerston naturally wanted to draw nearer to Austria. The opposition of interests of Russia and Austria, their jealousy of each other as eventual heirs of the Turkish Empire, might at the most be mitigated for a time, but could never be terminated except in a world war.

Palmerston built on this clash, and King Leopold was requested to use this lever on Metternich's weakest position. The idea was to bind the hands of Russia by manœuvring it out of its special position in regard to Turkey, and inducing it to sign a common treaty with England, France and Austria, guaranteeing the *status quo* of the Turkish Empire,<sup>1</sup> King Leopold emphasised that the idea was not to act *against* Russia, but *with* it, so as not to leave the plan too pointed; yet there was almost a note of menace in the English bid for Austria's support against Russia when, at the close of his letter to Metternich, King Leopold observes that Wellington said to him: "Whatever happens in England, we are so powerful that the continental Powers *will always find us in their way*. *It is to the interest of Austria and of Europe that the former should not isolate itself too much from us*."

King Leopold was at that time making every effort to serve the policy of England, for it was probable that

<sup>1</sup> Letter of King Leopold to Metternich, at the request of William IV, February 17, 1836 (State Archives).

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William IV would not live much longer, and Leopold's niece, Princess Victoria, whose youth would need guidance, would ascend the Throne. The King, who had twice—once as husband of Princess Charlotte, heiress to the Throne, and then in 1830, when a Regency seemed possible—eagerly sought a commanding position in England, had taken care always to stand high in the esteem of the leading Englishmen. This would not only help to secure his position in Belgium in case of need, but would, especially, enable him to play a great part in the general politics of Europe; and this part an ambitious monarch, of rare sagacity, enjoying a unique, almost international, position owing to his family connections, was well fitted to play.

## Chapter V

### KING LEOPOLD AND QUEEN VICTORIA

**K**ING LEOPOLD was well aware that, when his niece Victoria ascended the Throne, there would be a struggle to obtain influence over her. In his Belgian exile he was, in spite of all the confidential representatives he could send over, and in spite of the sentiment of relationship, bound to be at a disadvantage in this struggle. He was not merely consulting his selfish interests in the matter. He had taken Victoria to his house in her infancy, when there was no question of her ascending the Throne. They loved each other; and he felt that with his experience and shrewd principles he could guard the maiden from many dangers in the task of ruling a world-Empire for which she was necessarily not yet adequate.

At an early date, when the other people about the Princess had no serious ideas about such matters, he had meditated a marriage with some member of his own Coburg family, as this was the best way to attain both his ends. The future husband of the Princess must, however, be quite suitable in mind, spirit, and education to be the consort of the Queen of England, Leopold's delicate-minded, refined and intelligent niece. Any man who has read Queen Victoria's early diaries<sup>1</sup> will have

<sup>1</sup> She kept diaries all her life. They comprise more than a hundred volumes, and are for the most part unpublished. Besides her *Leaves*, only the diary from 1832 to 1840 has appeared, edited by Lord Esher (1913), *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*.



## KING LEOPOLD AND QUEEN VICTORIA

felt the charm of her pure, simple, child-like, yet highly intelligent, views of life. These diaries and her letters, which also are only partly published,<sup>1</sup> repeatedly show the deep influence which King Leopold had upon the young Princess and, in spite of everything, upon the later Queen.

The King began his education of her at a very early age. In greeting her on her thirteenth birthday, in May 1832, he urged her to give close attention in future to serious matters. At her next birthday he reflected much on her character, and gave her good advice as to its development. This letter is particularly interesting in giving an idea of King Leopold, as the counsels he gives in it by no means represent experiences of his own, and would justify no conclusion as to his own qualities. He especially commends two pieces of wisdom: self-searching and the art of discriminating between the essential and unessential. "Nothing," he says, "is stronger and clearer evidence of an unfitness for great and high enterprises than a mind that is taken up with trifles. Soundness of mind must show itself in distinguishing between the important and unimportant."

He shows profound wisdom in placing these counsels first in the education of the young, for there are few who see that this is one of the most important things in life. In the school itself the majority of the pupils are oppressed with a mass of unessential detail. Few teachers have the gift of putting the essence of a thing in pithy and striking phrases. The error is repeated in later life. The essence of the matter is lost under innumerable insignificant trifles, and these make it difficult to keep sight of the broad lines, to extract the kernel from the shell.

It is the natural gift of genius to pierce the veil of all things and see the nucleus alone. Others have to attain this wisdom by laborious experience and blunders; and they will never attain it without the exercise of a strong

<sup>1</sup> *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 3 vols. (1907).

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will. King Leopold had this wisdom, and he hastened to communicate it to the future Queen. No one in the world needs it more than a King, who holds in his hands the reins of a great dominion ; nowhere else has the lack of it such frightful consequences. The history of our own time is a tragic illustration of this.

King Leopold did not instruct his niece in a dry, moralising fashion. He enlivened his teaching with picturesque illustrations. He coloured it with examples taken from the story of youthful humanity and the life-experiences of historical personages. In this he showed, not only a surprising pedagogical sense, but a perception of the deepest aim of historical science : the discovery of the inner connections of events, especially of one's own age, the extension of the broad lines which emerge from the past, and the application to present needs of the great lessons which history conveys. The way in which these lessons are applied to one's life, the depth of one's comprehension, will be the measure of one's personality, and will make all the difference between success or failure in practical life.

"History is the most important study for you," he wrote to his niece ; and he indicated various periods in the history of France from which his niece might learn the great influence of character, personality and independence, the weakness of a monarch, or the effect of intrigue and favouritism upon the welfare of the country in question. It is interesting that King Leopold tried mainly to teach the Princess by negative examples. For instance, he recommended the study of the life of the physically weak, mentally insignificant, and easily influenced Queen Anne.<sup>1</sup>

This fact was noticed by the young Princess, and, after a time, she asked her uncle, now that she knew "what a Queen ought *not* to be, that you will send me

<sup>1</sup> He sent her a memorandum on Queen Anne (*Letters*, vol. I, p. 48).

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what a Queen *ought to be*." The King promised in a letter to do this, and doubtless he kept his promise. It is a pity that the document is not yet published, as it would give us a deeper insight into the kind and degree of the King's influence, as well as into his own character.

From her earliest years Princess Victoria had loved her uncle. In several places in the diary of her girlhood she speaks of her "dearest uncle" and of the "happiness" of being able to throw herself into his arms. She says that he had always been "like a father" to her, and she loved him warmly. There is infinite confidence in her words when, after reading the "Directions and Advices" which Leopold had written for his nephew Ferdinand in Portugal, she wrote triumphantly in her journal: "Ferdinand *must* succeed if he follows Uncle Leopold's advice."

In the circumstances King Leopold was not building on sand when he thought of linking the future Queen still more closely to himself and his house by marriage. His mother had some time before, when Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg, the second son of the reigning Duke Ernest, and his cousin, Princess Victoria, were only twelve years old, thought what a fine pair they would make.<sup>1</sup> King Leopold had followed with interest the development of his nephew, who was very handsome as well as clever and alert, and he concluded that the young Prince was in every respect suited to become the spouse of Princess Victoria.

In his subtle psychology the King attached great importance to the male beauty of the Prince, which was remarkable. Even Baron von Stockmar, who had at first preferred Albert's brother Ernest as husband of the Princess, wrote of him in a letter: "In external appearance he is all that a woman can wish, and that women in all ages and lands do wish."

<sup>1</sup> *Early Years of Prince Consort*, p. 17.

## CHOOSING A CONSORT

The King had entered into an understanding with his sister, Princess Victoria's mother, and she, naturally, in opposition to William IV, worked ardently for the plan. When, in 1836, King Leopold decided to send his nephew to England for the first time, William IV invited his own candidate, the Prince of Orange, to England at the same time. He is even said to have threatened that he would prevent the Coburg cousin from landing. This was very painful to King Leopold, as he worked with all his energy and heart for the marriage. There were, of course, rivals. "There seems to be a flood of German Princes pouring over us," Palmerston had written in June 1833. "The Duke of Brunswick, the Prince of Solms, two Dukes of Württemberg, and the Prince of Reuss-Loebensteingera, have all been seized with a sudden desire to see England."<sup>1</sup> Other rivals were a young Danish Prince and Victoria's cousin, Prince George of Cambridge.

Princess Victoria, now sixteen years old, knew quite well that King Leopold wished to see her married to her cousin. He does not seem to have made any secret of it from her. His outspokenness seems to have aroused a certain opposition in the Princess, but when her cousin came, and she became acquainted with the fresh, handsome youth, of her own age, this incipient sentiment was speedily crushed. "Albert is extremely handsome," she wrote in her journal on May 18, 1836. "His hair is about the same colour as mine. His eyes are large and blue, and he has a beautiful nose, a very sweet mouth with fine teeth. But the charm of his countenance is his expression which is most delightful; *c'est à la fois* full of goodness and *sweetness*, and very *clever* and intelligent."<sup>2</sup>

Albert's brother Ernest did not come off so well. "Albert is extremely handsome," we read further, in a letter of the Princess to King Leopold, "which Ernest

<sup>1</sup> *The Life of Viscount Palmerston*, by Sir H. Lytton Bulwer.

<sup>2</sup> *Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, I, 167.



## KING LEOPOLD AND QUEEN VICTORIA

certainly is not, but he has a most good-natured, honest and intelligent countenance." That, however, was of minor importance to a maid who could choose. King Leopold included this in his calculations. His plan had secured its first firm support. Shortly after the visit of the cousins the Princess had begged the King to "take care of the health of one now *so dear* to me, and to take him under your *special protection*."<sup>1</sup> The Princes had only remained three weeks in England. They left on June 10, 1836, and the Princess wept bitterly, as she confides to her journal.

In September, Leopold spent some time with his niece in England, and his relations with the young Princess became more intimate than ever. They had long conversations about the art of governing, about a woman's duties as wife and mother, and about science and art. He guided her development; and there are in the journal many enthusiastic references to her "so good, so excellent, so dear, so distinguished" beloved uncle. From this time Leopold counted upon the success of his matrimonial plan, and he worked zealously for the complete education of his nephew in every respect. For this purpose he kept Albert and his brother near him in Brussels for ten months, in order to give as much personal care and guidance as he could to the young Princes.

Meantime William IV's health had become precarious and the hour of the Princess's accession to the Throne approached. Hence in the early months of 1837 King Leopold paid particular attention to his niece, and his innumerable letters to her evince his fear lest she should become the tool of anybody. In May he decided to send his physician, confidential friend, and private secretary, Baron von Stockmar, to the Queen, with her permission, so that "the compass" should not go wrong. Already we find in the King's letters concrete political counsels,

<sup>1</sup> Letter to King Leopold, June 7, 1836 (*Letters*, I, 62).

as that "it is necessary to preserve the influence of Conservative principles and protect the Church," and, as regards foreign politics, to take under the protection of England the two Queens (Christina of Spain and Maria da Gloria of Portugal), who fared very badly. But, while he thus increased his political influence, the shrewd King toned down any outward expression of it, seeing that it might arouse opposition in the English ruling classes. He met certain objections to his visit to England at the critical moment by saying that he was carefully on his guard against any temptation to come in such a case for the purpose of "*ruling the realm for purposes of my own.*"<sup>1</sup>

The health of William IV steadily deteriorated. When he saw King Leopold for the last time at Windsor he said to him: "If ever France or any other Power invades your country, *it will* be a question of immediate war for England; we cannot suffer that."<sup>2</sup> Leopold replied that he was glad to hear it, as he certainly did not want any foreign Power in his country.

On June 20, 1837, William IV died, and Princess Victoria, then eighteen years old, ascended the Throne. This meant a very great change in the outer and inner life of the maid, and the child-like trustful way in which she had hitherto met all men gave way at once to much hesitation, even distrust, in regard to all who could be regarded as designing to exploit her youth and inexperience in order to attain a predominant influence over her. The teaching of King Leopold had fallen upon fruitful soil. In fact, his lessons now at times turned against himself in a way that he had probably not anticipated.

For instance, he may have gone too far when, three days after Victoria had ascended the throne, he wrote to her: "Before you come to any important decision,

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Princess Victoria, June 17, 1837 (*Letters*, I, 94).

<sup>2</sup> Letter of King Leopold to Queen Victoria, June 2, 1838 (*Letters*, I, 148).

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it would give me great pleasure if you would ask my advice. That would have the additional advantage of giving you time for reflection.”<sup>1</sup> The Queen’s reply was reserved. She said, it is true, “*your* advice is always of the *greatest importance* to me,” but she by no means promised to ask it on every important occasion. This did not mean that she would not occasionally do so. But Melbourne’s shrewd and impartial influence on the Queen tactfully prevented her from speaking of too intimate dependence on King Leopold; though it did not prevent her from describing herself openly as his friend. He found that the Queen thoroughly understood the right sort of relation of a Queen to her uncle. She kept her independence, while using his support and counsel on proper occasions, and she followed or declined it according as she or her principal statesmen thought it sound. The Queen, however, always followed the advice given her by Leopold in a second letter, not to decide any question at once (*de ne fas décider des questions sur le ponce*).

This, and the further experience communicated to her by King Leopold, that confidence of success very frequently means success, were constantly kept in mind by the Queen, and throughout her reign she followed these counsels. They were the outcome of the King’s own experiences and the maxims of his philosophy. His own observance of them are one of the secrets which explain his success in governing his country, and the consequent incomparable prosperity of Belgium at the end of his reign.

It was of the very nature of things that King Leopold should have, and retain, an influence over his niece. Apart altogether from selfish considerations, he had more right to this—if there is any question of right—than any other person on account of what he had done for her during

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, June 25, 1837 (vol. I, p. 102).

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childhood. In reality, if one were to proceed with strict legality, there was only one constitutional influence on her. King Leopold constantly had a vague feeling, not only that his influence would arouse violent opposition in England, but that he really had no such influence. He was aware that the position of Baron Stockmar, his confidential friend, who was also the Queen's mentor, would not last for ever. Stockmar was a foreigner, and in spite of his great tact and unselfishness, he would in time be regarded in England as a sort of spy, or at least as an outsider, and therefore one to be opposed.

This made the King all the more anxious to realise his matrimonial plan. Matters would then be simpler. The character of the Queen, the English Constitution, and the vigilance of the British Ministers were nevertheless elements which, even if Prince Albert were personally willing to be the mere tool of his uncle, would prevent him from having too great an influence on the fate of the country.

The matter had, however, not gone very far. The Queen was obstinately silent about the marriage project, and King Leopold suspected all sorts of intrigues. It was due to this fear that he wrote to his niece: "I beg you again to permit no one, not even your Prime Minister, to speak to you about things which concern you personally, unless you have expressed a wish that they should do so." Queen Victoria had not seen Prince Albert for two years. Her impression must have cooled, and more recent experiences may have displaced it.

King Leopold's relation to his niece did not pass unnoticed in the rest of Europe. Metternich was one of the first to try to acquire influence over the Queen through her uncle: naturally, in the interest of the propaganda of his Conservative principles, for the reintroduction of which into England the change of ruler seemed to him an excellent opportunity. On July 14th, scarcely a month



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after the Queen's accession, he tried to win King Leopold for his plan of securing influence. He would now forget his grievances against the Belgian King, since he wanted something of him. Leopold, however, was suddenly not too Liberal. The Chancellor wrote :

Your Majesty leads your Government, in spite of the difficulties, on Conservative lines—the only proper lines. I wish from my heart that you would spread the influence of your example. King Louis Philippe will understand you ; and it is to be hoped that the young Queen of England will make no mistake in the direction she gives to her opening reign.<sup>1</sup>

Metternich next tried to follow up this direct intervention with an indirect manœuvre. For this he made use of Field-Marshal Lieutenant Count Emanuel Mensdorff-Pouilly,<sup>2</sup> who was serving in Austria, and was married to King Leopold's sister, Princess Sophie of Saxe-Coburg. He was to be Metternich's intermediary in furthering his two great aims : the strengthening of Conservative principles in Portugal as well as in England. In the latter country, use was to be made of King Leopold's relations with Queen Victoria ; in Portugal of the King's nephew, the Queen's husband.

In a conversation with Count Mensdorff, which was to be repeated to King Leopold, Metternich tried to win back the young Queen of Portugal to the Conservative Powers. In Spain she was to support Don Carlos, who had made some progress, and in Portugal to secure the introduction of a system of Government that would permit her to resume the interrupted relations. Austria had broken off diplomatic relations with Portugal, because, in spite of the nominal rule of the King, revolutionary principles were in the ascendancy there, and to renew the relations

<sup>1</sup> Celsissimus (as Metternich was called in the Byzantine language of the Ballplatz) to King Leopold, July 14, 1837 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Count E. Mensdorff was the grandfather of Count Albert Mensdorff, who was Austrian Ambassador at London until the war, and is now the representative of the Republic of Austria in the League of Nations.

would, as Mensdorff wrote, be to recognise the Revolution, "which can never, and ought not to, be."<sup>1</sup>

At the time the Constitution of Portugal was the democratic scheme wrung from the Queen on September 9, 1836, which was an abomination to Metternich and the Eastern Powers. This State, however, was of less moment to Metternich. His chief concern was to get influence over Queen Victoria. Count Mensdorff's report to King Leopold gives very clearly the method of procedure of the Chancellor.

From that [Portugal] the conversation passed to England and its present situation. I found the Prince so well posted in the affairs of the family *qu'il en savait presque plus que moi*. We talked of Conroy and his influence on Victoria.<sup>2</sup> It gave rise to apprehension that the Queen might make mistakes under his influence, and throw herself into the arms of the ultra-Liberals—nay, the Radicals. The Prince spoke of his candid and friendly relations with you, of his detestation of all extremism, and of his wish that some shrewd and proper-minded friend would take an opportunity to warn the Queen to beware of Conroy's ambition, well knowing that this obscure individual will do anything, and shrink from no sacrifices, to attain his end. This concern lest Queen Victoria might fall into the wrong hands gave the Prince the idea that you might be her guardian angel, and, as I know from my brother and my dear wife how much influence you have with her, and what unlimited confidence she has in your advice, I confirmed him in his idea. He painted the sad consequences that might follow any mistake on the part of the Queen in such dark colours, with the deep insight which you know him to possess, that I feel it my duty to call your attention to it. The moments are precious, and in the Prince's opinion the path she must take must be made perfectly clear, and announced, at the very beginning of her reign.<sup>3</sup>

Count Mensdorff was quite sure that King Leopold would at once comply with the wishes of Metternich. "For," as he wrote to the King, "there is no doubt that you will set your hand to the task, and, in my opinion,

<sup>1</sup> Mensdorff to King Leopold, from Teplitz, July 21, 1837 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Sir John Conroy, chief adviser and Master of the Household to the Duchess of Kent, the Queen's mother.

<sup>3</sup> Letter quoted above (July 21st).

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in declaring for the *principe conservateur*, you will do well for yourself." The King answered indirectly, and very briefly and evasively. He kept clear of the essential point, and did not even name the two Queens who were to be influenced. He was content to give a general assurance that he shared the Chancellor's views; that part of what he wished was already done, and much would be done; and that he had "acted" considerably in that sense. He further spoke of the need of caution in view of the frequent violations of the secrecy of the post, and said that he would write at greater length in a few days.<sup>1</sup> But, as Count Mensdorff at once suspected, and as he said to Prince Metternich on September 10th, in communicating the above message to him, the detailed second letter was never written.

King Leopold was too much concerned about his own position and his own influence with the Queen, which was over-estimated by everybody, particularly Count Mensdorff. He was, moreover, far too prudent to burn his fingers for other people, and to weaken his influence even before the Queen's marriage, by trying to meddle, as the mouthpiece of foreign Powers, in England's home politics; which was the gist of Metternich's plan. Leopold had his own views, and he had no mind to show his cards.

In the later days of September, 1837, he went again to England. The Belgians were not pleased with the King's frequent visits to England; though every class of the nation was, on the other hand, flattered by the belief, which was current, that their King had a decisive influence on the ruler of the British Empire. As the Austrian Ambassador, Count Rechberg, wrote from Brussels, it was said in that capital that the King's advice to his niece was to avoid all extremes in politics and insensibly to bring about a fusion of the moderate Whigs with the Tories.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Count Mensdorff, August 4, 1837 (State Archives).

The King's stay at Windsor, of which the Queen gives us a lively description in her journal, made the relations between them closer than ever, if that were possible. She "looked up to him, and loved him as a father," as she wrote, and his departure saddened her. She deeply missed his conversation and support. The understanding they reached was so great that King Leopold again broached the subject of the marriage. He recalls a remark which she made to him in her letter of April 4, 1838, that she had concluded a sort of pact with reference to the direct "training" of Prince Albert for his coming task.<sup>1</sup> As the Queen spoke of the end of his education, it seemed as if at the moment of writing the letter she was disposed to enter into the question of the marriage at no very distant date.

King Leopold was elated by the success of his policy, at home and abroad. In particular, he seemed to over-estimate a little the position he would win by the marriage of Queen Victoria, the temporarily more friendly attitude of Metternich—which only lasted as long as he wanted something—and the influence of his wife with her father, the King of France.

In spite of the Treaty of November 15, 1831, which awarded to Holland the whole of the Province of Limburg on the right bank, and the northern extremity on the left bank of the Maas while the Walloon part of Luxemburg was to go to Belgium, the country was still not quite clear about it. The Dutch had refused to evacuate two of the Antwerp forts which they held, and the Belgians kept the parts of Limburg and Luxemburg in question; especially as the Dutch King had stubbornly refused to recognise treaties which included the independence of Belgium, however favourable or unfavourable they were to Holland. As Belgium remained on this

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*: the Queen says: "There is another *sujet* I wish to mention to you, *et que j'ai bien à cœur*: which is, if you would consult Stockmar with respect to the finishing of Albert's education" (I, 140).



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account for eight years in undisturbed possession of the illegally detained territories, it looked as if a prescriptive right had arisen, and William of Holland was threatened with the risk of precisely the opposite of what he had sought to obtain by his opposition to the Treaty. It looked as if Belgium would now never give up the very valuable fertile provinces which she held as security for the two Antwerp forts.

He therefore abandoned his attitude of obstinacy, and on March 14, 1838, declared himself ready to accept the twenty-four articles which had been formulated in London. But King Leopold and a large part of the Belgian nation were no longer enamoured of those resolutions. They had become much too accustomed to regard the two provinces as belonging to Belgium, and had too much profit from them. King Leopold thought, moreover, that, with the aid of the strong position he had won in the last few years, he could secure a revision of the twenty-four articles drafted under the influence of the Dutch victories of 1831. Hence, pressed by the Chamber and the nation, he decided to test for the first time, in the interest of his country, his influence with his niece. He was unpleasantly disillusioned. He found for the first time that the English Ministers were on their guard, and that the Queen had not the least idea of being a mere tool, even in the hands of her beloved uncle, in spite of all her real gratitude to him.

In her earliest youth she had laid down the principle which she made, often with a heavy heart and against her own feelings, the standard of her whole reign: to be a constitutional monarch. King Leopold had long hesitated to write to her, but shortly before the settlement of the Belgo-Dutch frontier question he decided to do so. He begged her, relying on her loyalty to him, to give her Ministers and Melbourne to understand that, as the letter runs, "as far as it was consistent with the

interests of her own possessions, she did not wish her Government to take the lead in any measures which must in a short time lead to the destruction of this land [Belgium] and of her uncle and his family."

The Belgian King painted the situation darker than it really was, in order to induce his niece to put pressure upon her Ministers to make the changes he proposed in the Treaty, which amounted to a sort of re-purchase of the territory ceded to Holland. The English Ministry regarded with grave distrust King Leopold's attempt to upset, by his personal intervention with the English Crown, a Treaty concluded in London and ratified by all the Powers. Thus the King's conduct had the opposite effect to what he intended. The Cabinet made it a formal question of prestige to oppose this unconstitutional influence upon the jealously guarded young Queen. The Prussian Ambassador, Bülow, created a great disturbance in London. Even Palmerston, who had for a time thought of refraining from opposing the plan of re-purchase, in the end abandoned the King entirely. Queen Victoria was compelled to tell her uncle, in a very cordial but unfavourable letter, that the Treaty was ratified by all the Powers, and therefore binding, and therefore "it is almost impossible to consider it as otherwise, and to set aside those parts of it which have been ratified by all the parties."<sup>1</sup>

This bitter pill was not sugar-coated by the assurance of the Queen that Belgium was now "a link in the chain which guaranteed the continuance of peace," since, owing to the happy circumstance of the double relationships of its King, to her and to the French King, "Belgium, which was once the bone of contention between England and France, was now the land which connected them." The attitude of England caused great astonishment, and made a deep impression on the Continent. It was regarded

<sup>1</sup> *Letters* (June 10, 1838), I, 151.

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as an unsuccessful test of the much-discussed relations of King Leopold to Queen Victoria. This was the more painful to the King as, in order to impress the world with his position, he had dropped a word here and there about his great influence with his niece, the Queen of England. He had written in this sense to the Archduke John :

The Queen is, of course, very young, and one has to learn experience oneself. She has, however, natural ability and quick comprehension. She is attentive to matters of State, studies them herself, and shows a firm will in everything. She regards me as the natural friend that I have been since she was nine months old, and *I have her confidence in a high degree*. As the English are very jealous, I go *very cautiously*; but I must say that all parties were *pleased* with my visit in August and September (1837), and in England, where passions are so strong, that is saying much.<sup>1</sup>

That was written in December 1837. In June 1838 the words were belied and punished !

When Palmerston at length assured the anxious Prussians, who supported the Dutch Royal Family on account of its connection with their own, that he upheld the Treaty, the attitude of almost all the continental Powers turned at a stroke against Belgium. King Leopold was most deeply embittered. He wrote to Queen Victoria that she had "put him aside as one does a piece of furniture which is no longer wanted." He added that Palmerston's declaration had "hurt me more in my English capacity than in my Belgian, as I came to this country from England, and was chosen *for that very reason*." <sup>2</sup>

Nor had he received any support from France, where he had relied upon his father-in-law. Louis Philippe and the French could not forget how independent King Leopold had been during the years of his reign. The marriage with the King's daughter had, as was hoped in

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Archduke John from Laeken, December 2, 1837 (Meran Archives).

<sup>2</sup> *Letters* (June, 1838), I, 152.

France, been arranged with a view to their acquiring influence in Belgium, not so that the Belgian Queen should be used as a tool for working upon her Royal father. Moreover, Leopold's intimacy with Queen Victoria had reawakened the jealousy of France, which dreaded the paramount influence of England in Belgium; and, finally, the French and English Cabinets were at the time very far from agreement, especially on account of the Eastern question. Hence, when King Leopold was not supported by England in the matter of the twenty-four articles, it gave King Louis Philippe a certain malicious satisfaction; and, paradoxical as it may seem, the two Cabinets, very unfriendly to each other, and so different in their policy as regards Belgium, came closer to each other in the rejection of King Leopold's wishes.

The King was quite aware of the real views and sentiments of the French. He wrote to the Archduke:

The dangerous political legacy-hunter for us is France. There are two ways: conquest or alliance and appropriation. England would not readily admit the former. The latter is more dangerous. The best guarantee *against it* is the country's love of its independence.<sup>1</sup>

The King had gone so far as to think of realising his wishes by force of arms. Thousands of volunteers gave in their names, and military preparations were started. Holland began to take counter-measures. But one Power after the other deserted Leopold, and the Eastern Powers began openly to show themselves hostile. As the Western Powers deserted Leopold, they and Austria, with Metternich at the head, had no reason to spare a King "of revolutionary origin." King Leopold felt this most acutely in what was called "the Skrzynecki affair," which gave Prussia and Austria a welcome pretext to abandon him, and at the same time amounted to an act

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Archduke John, March 27, 1839 (State Archives).



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of courtesy of the two Powers to the Tsar, who was particular sensitive on the subject of Polish revolution.

The former Polish General, Jan Boncza Skrzynecki, who had taken an important part in the Polish revolutions of 1830 and 1831, and had, in spite of his defeat at Ostrolenka in May, retained the command of the Polish Revolutionary army until August 1831, had taken refuge in Austria after the fall of Warsaw. His position there, considering the well-known views of Metternich, was not enviable. He was treated as a prisoner. His correspondence, even with his wife, was intercepted, and his repeated request to go to England or France was refused.

The Belgian Army was, naturally, in need of superior Generals, especially such as had had experience of war; a circumstance which gave King Leopold much concern in view of the permanently hostile attitude of the King of Holland. He heard through friends of the General of his unhappy position and his military ability. In Russia the King was regarded as ungrateful, on account of his going over so completely to England and his rejection of the offer of the Greek Throne, which had been warmly supported by Russia. The Tsar's attitude toward Belgium, therefore, offered no ground for taking that monarch into consideration.

General Skrzynecki, to whom the Austrian Government had several times refused permission to depart, feared a fresh refusal, and, when King Leopold invited him to Brussels, he left Prague secretly in the hope of taking up service in the Belgian Army. This flight of a General with a revolutionary past gave Metternich a new opportunity to represent Belgium as a country that welcomed adventurers. He then, on quite other grounds of higher politics, treated it as an unfriendly act to Austria, making it necessary to break off diplomatic relations with Belgium. Prussia—not without some pressure from Metternich, of

course—took up the same position, and the Austrian Ambassador, Count Rechberg, as well as the Prussian, Count Seckendorff, delivered a short ultimatum and, although the Belgian Government, which persisted in refusing to ratify the twenty-four articles, had resigned, they left the capital on February 5, 1839.

Metternich had closely followed the course of events. He and the Prussian monarch had observed with some concern the leaning of the Belgian King to England and France, Powers which were not only Liberal, but not well disposed toward Germanism, and he was annoyed by Leopold's indirect rejection of his attempt to acquire influence over Queen Victoria. He now grasped the opportunity, as King Leopold was also abandoned by the Western Powers, to give the "revolutionary Throne" a lesson, in conjunction with Prussia, which was friendly to Holland.

For a time it seemed as if Belgium would have the whole of Europe against it, and as if there would be an entirely new solution of the Belgian question, perhaps in the sense of a restoration of the conditions set up by the Treaty of 1815. It was, naturally, unpleasant for Austria and Prussia to reflect that they, the "maintaining" Conservative Powers, had recognised a State, and appointed diplomatic representatives to it, which was created by a revolutionary violation of their principles and treaties of 1815. Hence any opportunity was welcome which gave them a free hand to alter the conditions.

The General Skrzynecki affair gave them a sort of pretext, and it was manipulated in such a fashion as to lead to a breach of diplomatic relations. Metternich at the same time wrote a letter to the King in which he said that he must put an end to the belief that Austria, as a Conservative Power, would not venture to do anything to Catholic Belgium, or that Radical tendencies

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could build upon the "frequently imagined rivalry between Austria, Prussia, and Russia."<sup>1</sup> In his further remark, that, "if Belgium resists, it confronts the fate which befalls all enterprises which make an ally of revolution," Metternich showed that at least he regarded the continuance of Belgium as questionable.

King Leopold was very painfully affected by this complete desertion on the part of Prussia and, especially, of Austria. He had clung to Austria, and its strong position on the Continent at the time of the Vienna Congress had made an ineffaceable impression on him. His feeling is reflected in the reply which he sent to Metternich. He ran over the whole of the questions raised by his refusal to carry out completely the Treaty of November 15, 1831. He had, meantime, realised that it was impossible to stand alone against almost the whole world, and had regretfully resigned himself to the territorial sacrifices, with the small consolation that at least on the financial side he had done something for his country. In regard to the invitation of the Polish General, he explained to Metternich that they did not want to increase the number of French Generals serving in their Army, as "they were regarded invidiously both in the country [Belgium] and in England."<sup>2</sup> They wanted, he said, a good man in case of emergency, and

this is the more necessary as at the Hague there is a *foi punique*, on which one can have little reliance, as is proved by the attack of 1831, and because the Cabinet there has always worked to get up a genuine war, in the sweet hope that it would end as in 1814.

The King was angry at the departure of the Austrian and Prussian envoys within twenty-four hours after the request for the release of the Polish General, without the least regard for the "important matter of a change of Cabinet." He meant that his Belgians were aston-

<sup>1</sup> Letter to King Leopold, February 17, 1839 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Metternich, from Brussels, March 3, 1839 (State Archives).

ishly jealous about their rights, and he saw all the success he had had in consolidating the State, in spite of the "miserable resources of the Constitution," rendered precarious. He went on :

I had *quite got rid* of the anarchist crowd, and the monarchic principle had made great progress, much greater than in France, when the ruthless and careless decisions of the Conference came to revive all sorts of violent passions. The feeling of our people who have been *given* to Holland is much the same as the feeling would be if part of Austria were awarded to Bavaria. The province was too long with us, precisely owing to the action of King William, for it to be possible to pacify several hundred thousand men by force alone. My position is very hard and unenviable, and I am making new and painful sacrifices for the peace of Europe by accepting the decisions of the Powers and inducing my country to do so. It would be dangerous to the country not to accept, but it might be just as dangerous for the Powers, and a violent enforcement of them might have consequences which are not to be ignored. My view, as known to your Excellency, is unchanged : *every great European crisis will do more for the democratic than for the monarchical principle.*

The King was greatly embittered, and he reminded Metternich that he was personally independent and could choose a more congenial situation than that in Belgium "where there is far too much trouble and worry."

The same feeling of bitterness, owing to the great diplomatic defeat he had sustained in the eyes of all Europe, was sharply expressed in his letters to Queen Victoria. In one very angry letter to her he again said that, in view of the disillusion the country had experienced—a disillusion in which the British Government had taken the "lead"—he would be its first and last King, and that, if he did retire, it would be "very awkward" for England, but "deservedly so."<sup>1</sup> But the Queen, in a letter of April 30, declined to enter into any further discussion of the Belgian question, as she saw with regret that on this *one* point she did not agree with King

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Queen Victoria, April 19, 1839 (*Letters*, I, 192).



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Leopold.<sup>1</sup> Although, however she emphasised that they differed only in one matter, it seemed that the political differences cast a shade upon the personal relations of uncle and niece. This state of things might be very unfortunate for the King in regard to the projected marriage. The young Queen began, in a remarkable manner, to show a will and principles of her own in her personal affairs as well as in politics. When Lord Melbourne once spoke to her of the fact that no member of her family could marry without her permission, she replied that that was a rather hard rule. And when, in the further course of the conversation, the fact was noticed that many daughters married and left the choice of husbands to their parents, the Queen answered that she thought "in such matters it was necessary to decide for oneself."

Apparently, however, she had at that time little inclination to marry. When, on one occasion, she was talking with Lord Melbourne about the late King's wish that she should wed the Prince of Orange, she asked if the country very much wanted to see her married, as "she wished to remain as she was for some time."

The news which King Leopold received from England and his not very serious personal aloofness after the settlement of the Belgo-Dutch question gave him some concern that possibly the marriage he projected for his niece would not now take place. Realistic politician as he was, however, he had no mind to let his diplomatic defeat have any further consequences, or prove the grave of all his hopes. In Belgium people began at once to adapt themselves to the accomplished fact. The country settled down, and the restoration of diplomatic relations with Austria and Prussia helped to bring tranquillity. The King, therefore, determined to take up again his favourite

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, I, 193.

design of marrying Queen Victoria, which was, he felt, now threatened from every side.

In the meantime Baron von Stockmar had, with the consent of Queen Victoria, been sent to accompany Prince Albert on a voyage. He was to instruct the Prince in regard to English conditions and in a general way prepare him for his eventual sphere of action. This was a very significant action on the part of the Queen, yet she had told King Leopold that she could not decide until she saw him again. Everything depended on the future.

Through the Queen's mother and in other ways the King took care that the thought of Prince Albert should be unostentatiously, but incessantly, brought to her mind. The Queen was much occupied with the question, and she recalled the handsome appearance, the cheerful temper, and the worthy life of her young cousin. The sentiment was, however, in opposition to a certain feeling of resentment that she, the Queen, should give her hand to a man who was imposed upon her by others without her having seen him. Her vacillation was expressed in many conversations with her friend, counsellor, and Minister, the shrewd, highly cultivated, and very tactful Lord Melbourne. One day she summoned up her courage, and spoke to Lord Melbourne of the great desire of her uncle that she should wed her cousin Albert. He made various objections—the unpopularity of the Coburgs abroad, the feeling in England against a foreigner and a marriage with a cousin—but he had to admit the Queen's contention, after running over the list of possible Princes, that Albert was the most suitable. On the whole, it encouraged her in the idea of marrying Albert, but she was in no hurry. "I said," she writes in her journal, "I dreaded the thought of marrying; that I was so accustomed to have my own way that I thought it was ten to one that I should not agree with anybody."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Girlhood*, April 18, 1839.

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The opposition grew, even in Ministerial circles in England, and the fact was not unknown to King Leopold, who was well informed about English affairs by his sister. He was bound to tell himself that it was high time, if all were not to be lost, to try the personal impression on Queen Victoria of Prince Albert, now that he had developed into a picture of masculine beauty and vigour, with equal endowment of mind and body. He therefore wrote to the Queen that her cousins, Ernest and Albert, would shortly visit England. The Queen did not object, but, the nearer the time of the visit came, the more uneasy she became, as she felt that it was necessary to decide one way or the other. On July 12, 1839, she said to Lord Melbourne that she was not too anxious to see Albert, as, although they were not affianced, the young man knew that there was question of a marriage.

"I said," she writes in her journal, "that it was disagreeable for me to see him, and a disagreeable thing." It was, of course, not the policy of Lord Melbourne to recommend a marriage with Prince Albert, but, when the Queen closed the conversation with the remark that she did not want to marry at all, he found this equally disagreeable, and plainly told the Queen so. The issue of this conversation and of her fluctuating feelings was a letter of the young Queen to her uncle, saying that she would scarcely be prepared to marry for two or three years yet, and that in any case she could only feel toward Albert as toward a friend, cousin, or brother, but no more. She concluded by emphasising that she had made no promise to wed him, and could give none.<sup>1</sup>

The letter very much upset King Leopold. He saw how powerful the influences on the Queen had become in the absence of himself and Stockmar. He had already felt this when a proposal that his father-in-law, for whom he was to inquire, should visit England was not assented

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, July 15, 1839 (I, 224).

to by the English Ministers, and was therefore declined by the Queen. Now he saw the whole of his marriage project threatened, and his high hopes tottering on their foundations. It was too long a time since the Queen had seen her handsome and radiant cousin. The favourable impression of 1836 had paled. The brilliant festivals, the Royal dignity and duties, the new environment, were all calculated to divert the Queen's thoughts to other matters, and obliterate the memory of her cousin. King Leopold said to himself that a great effort must be made at once. His nephew must, at all costs, enter the lists *himself*, to try to overcome the Queen's objections with the magic of his personality and win his own fortune at the last hour.

Various obstacles were surmounted, and the two nephews took ship for England in the early days of October 1839. The Queen's good resolutions were all dissipated at her first meeting with Prince Albert. Struck by the great change which, outwardly and inwardly, the last few years had made in the Prince, she wrote in her journal on October 10th, immediately after seeing him : "It was with some emotion that I beheld Albert—who really *is beautiful*." The next day she wrote : "Albert really is quite charming, and so excessively handsome—such beautiful blue eyes, an exquisite nose, and such a pretty mouth, with delicate moustachios, and slight, but very slight, whiskers : a beautiful figure, broad in the shoulders and a fine waist."

By October 14th the Queen had decided. All her objections had vanished. She no longer asked Melbourne about the country's wishes. The three or four years she was to remain single were forgotten. She was now wholly bent upon becoming the wife of her "dearest" Albert. The whole impulsiveness of her character was thrown into this quick decision, impatient of all obstacles. Love had, like a whirlwind, swept into the heart of the



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Royal maiden, so lovely on the height of her Throne, and had mastered her more rapidly than uncle or Ministers, Court dames or relatives, ever could with their influences.

Full of joy, she wrote to tell her uncle Leopold of the engagement, adding that she wished to be married as soon as possible, about the end of February. The King answered that "nothing could have given him more pleasure than that news." After all the disillusionings of the last few years, all the diplomatic defeats, here was at last a triumph of his plans: a triumph that meant a turning-point in his life, for from that moment he began to play in European policy the great part at which he had always aimed, and for which he was especially fitted by his mature political judgment, his family connections, and his position at the head of a country which had so much occupied the attention of the most powerful States of Europe.

## *Chapter VI*

### *INTERVENTION IN EASTERN AFFAIRS*

THE TRIUMPH which King Leopold's plans had won by the marriage of the Queen of England with his nephew soon made itself felt in his intimate relations with, and influence upon, the Queen, especially in the great questions of European politics. During the few months of the engagement there was a very animated correspondence between uncle and niece. It was mainly in connection with the various questions which arose in regard to the marriage, but it gave the King an opportunity to make suggestions to the Queen, and indirectly to her Ministers, which should orientate English policy in the reopening Eastern question.

This was most important to King Leopold, as there seemed to be, on that question, a sharp antagonism between England and France, the two States which he had chiefly to take into consideration. The Vienna peace of 1815 had been less burdensome to the conquered French on account of the reintroduction of the Bourbons by the conquerors. Territorially, France in 1815 did not do very badly; but in regard to world power it was reduced to a feebleness and insignificance which were rare in its history, and it had little voice in the counsels of the nations for some time. Hence for France it really meant a national humiliation and defeat, and contemporaries, who were more critical about the matter, said, as

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Stockmar did, that "the peace decisions of 1814 and 1815 were dictated by the conquerors in a sentiment of predominant power, and that it was, therefore, no wonder that they embodied a certain insolence, and the entire French nation wanted to shake off the fetters and seek revenge."

In the early years there was nothing to be done. The Bourbons were glad to be back on the Throne, and they spent their strength in not very far-seeing reactionary measures in their own country. Moreover, until the July Revolution of 1830 they were under the protection of the Powers to whom they owed the Throne; and the armed intervention of France in the troubles of Spain showed the French Army as a buttress of the Conservative Holy Alliance. Spain had risen against Ferdinand VII, who wanted an absolute monarchy, and had suppressed the Parliamentary Constitution; the country had forced him, by a successful revolution, to withdraw. Metternich and the Tsar had decided to intervene, and had entrusted France with the task.

England alone, under the lead of Canning, had disagreed, as it was contrary to its Liberal principles, and it wished to preserve the freedom of the Spanish people and to check the spread of French influence in the Peninsula, which had been very considerable in the days of Napoleon. It was no more prepared to allow France a decisive influence in Spanish affairs than to permit it to annex Belgium. It showed this in the time of Napoleon I, at the French intervention of 1823, under Louis Philippe (in opposing the Spanish marriage of a Bourbon), and many times down to our own days.

Although it was mainly due to England's influence that France got so little profit for itself by its intervention in favour of Absolutism, the Holy Alliance felt that it was indebted to France, and it raised no objections when Charles X began to take a more active part in foreign

politics, especially in his proceedings in Algiers. The English saw this beginning with concern, but, owing to the general situation, could not openly oppose it. It was, however, quite otherwise after the July Revolution, when Louis Philippe sought to give some strength to his new rule by annexing at least a part of Belgium. France had to feel the heavy hand and the iron resolution of England, which would not permit it to play in Belgium the part which it had always wanted to play, now wanted more than ever, and always will want.

Under its bourgeois King, France tried to get rid of the bonds which the Holy Alliance and England put upon it in regard to large questions of European policy. Louis Philippe was no longer a King by the grace of the Holy Alliance, as Louis XVIII and Charles X had been. He took his stand on the fact that he had received his power from the people. And nothing makes a King more loved by his people, especially an ambitious and power-seeking people like the French, than an aggressive and successful foreign policy. Hence Louis Philippe's effort to show that France was determined once more to have a part in the main European questions, and to make it clear that the dictating Powers of 1815 could no longer settle every European contingency in their own interest without opposition and some risk of war.

An excellent opportunity was provided by the question, which became acute in the later 'thirties and was the centre of European interest, of the struggle of the insurgent Egyptian Viceroy, Mehemed Ali, against the Sultan. At the heart of the question was that of the future position of Egypt and Syria. Hitherto on Eastern questions France had more or less followed in the wake of the other great Powers. Mehemed Ali's son, Ibrahim, had just defeated the Sultan's army at Nisib, on the Euphrates, on June 24, 1839; although young Hellmuth von Moltke, who was then Prussian instructor of the



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Turkish Army, had advised the Turks, in view of the unsatisfactory condition of the Army, not to hazard a decisive engagement. When they refused to listen, he at once left the Turkish Army, immediately before the battle.

Sultan Mahmud had recently died, and his successor, Abdul Mejid, then only sixteen years old, had, together with the burden of Government, taken over the thankless task which the complete triumph of Mehemed Ali laid upon Turkey. He could do nothing but put himself entirely in the hands of the European Powers. He was not ignorant of their appetite for Turkish territory, but he relied upon their lack of unity and their jealousy, and he hoped to get aid against Mehemed Ali at a reasonable price. This was the moment which France chose for its entry on the stage. The continuous struggle for Algiers was not at the time in the most promising phase, but the French were determined to break the Arab force fighting under Abd el Kadir, and they already thought of gradually taking over the whole Mediterranean coast of Africa. To this Egypt, whose fate was to be settled, belonged ; indeed, it was the most valuable part, and it was hallowed by the campaign of Napoleon I.

Full of the fame of Mehemed Ali and his son, Louis Philippe, following the advice of Thiers, believed that it would be a particularly clever move for France suddenly to oppose the Powers which were, on the recognised principle of the "Legitimacy" of the Sultan, hostile to the Egyptian Viceroy. The King hoped that, by taking the part of Mehemed Ali and earning the gratitude of that powerful and hitherto successful statesman, he could, perhaps, obtain a decisive influence on the important and much coveted land of the ancient Egyptians.

When it was proposed by the European Powers to exert their force collectively in support of the Sultan, the antagonism was made clear and, as if to emphasise

it, France began openly to mobilise. There was a strenuous agitation throughout the country, and an attempt to inflame the passions of the nation by reviving the claim of the Rhine frontier. This attitude on the part of France led to a violent reaction in Prussia and the rest of Germany, where the fighting spirit of 1813 was thoroughly aroused once more. Russia and its Conservative Tsar had never been reconciled with the French bourgeois King on account of his revolutionary origin, and, in view of this sudden development in France, forgot the obvious antithesis of their interests to those of Austria and England in the Eastern question, on which Louis Philippe had relied to a very great extent.

But the sharpest opposition was in England, especially in the mind of its very able and hot-blooded Foreign Minister, Palmerston. He saw at once the weakness of the French position, if the understanding of Austria, Russia, and England could be maintained at least for a time, as was quite possible. "The French policy," says Sir Henry Lytton Bulwer in his *Life of Palmerston*, "was natural in a country hostile to England. It is impossible for the Power that holds India to allow France to obtain control, directly or indirectly, of the route to India."

King Leopold had, on account of his relationship to the dynasties of both France and England, watched the development of the conflict with great anxiety, and had at once decided to devote his serious attention to it. On October 22, 1839, he met Metternich at Wiesbaden, and the Chancellor pressed him to lay proposals for the unity of the Powers in the proceedings against Mehemed Ali before Louis Philippe and Queen Victoria. He consented, and wrote at once in that sense.<sup>1</sup>

France, however, refused his mediation, broke away from the rest of the Powers, and stood openly and

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Queen Victoria, from Wiesbaden, October 24, 1839 (*Letters*, I, 239).

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unreservedly on the side of Mehemed Ali. This became plain when Thiers, the author of the whole plan, was appointed, on March 1, 1840, head of a Ministry which was to carry out the new foreign policy of France very vigorously. King Leopold had not much time to enjoy the marriage of his niece to Prince Albert, which had taken place three weeks earlier. The impending danger of trouble between England and his father-in-law, whose son, the Duc de Nemours, he wanted to marry to another niece of his, Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg-Koháry, must be averted. There must be no war between two States which were so near to the Belgian King, as it might very well be fought on his own back.

As England, which had long been secretly interested in Egypt, could not contemplate a settlement of the French in that country, and pressed for an alliance of Austria, Prussia, Russia, and England to protect Turkey, King Leopold proposed to moderate France by his influence on the King, who really regarded the risk with some concern, and at the same time to work for an understanding by means of his relations with England and Austria. He himself was bound to lose by any conflict between France and England. It was clear that, in the event of war between France and England—and this is as true to-day as it was then was—France would at once resolve to annex Belgium. It was, therefore, of the greatest interest to King Leopold to avert a conflict, and throughout 1840 we find him doing his utmost to bring about an understanding. Above all things he tried to influence Austria, as he knew that, in spite of the alliance with Russia, there was considerable distrust of the “Conservative” Tsar’s Oriental plans. This was all the easier because Metternich had changed astonishingly in his attitude toward King Leopold since the marriage of Queen Victoria. The abandonment by England in the Belgo-Dutch question had at an earlier date strongly

influenced the attitude of all the European States toward the King. Now the marriage, in which the whole of the Continent saw a successful move of the King, had immensely strengthened his position in Europe. Moreover, the marriage of the Duc de Nemours, arranged so as to secure Coburg influence at the French Court for another generation, had taken place. The King even contemplated a marriage of Princess Clementine, daughter of Louis Philippe, to his nephew August of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha; and it actually occurred a few years later (April 20, 1843).

The more closely King Leopold linked himself with France, the more he was bound to come into conflict with Palmerston, who felt that he held all the trumps in his own hand in any game with France. He thought that France *could not* wage war, as it would at once have against it the far superior British Fleet, strengthened by the Russian. This would threaten the expedition to Algiers; while France would be involved with the other continental Powers on the Rhine, and Mehemed Ali would be too far away to give it any assistance. Moreover, the Bourbon and Bonapartist pretenders would be supported by France's enemies, and would give it further trouble.

In the circumstances it was easy to take up a strong attitude toward France. The British Cabinet decided, as usual, first to make representations to Louis Philippe in regard to his naval preparations, "We must," they said, "force the French to give a clear and satisfactory explanation as regards the building of their Fleet." The same policy was then followed in regard to France as later in regard to Germany and its growing naval power.

King Leopold saw that there was no time to lose: that he must mediate at once. He first relied on his relations with the leading statesman of Austria. In his letter he represented himself and Metternich as physicians, standing by the bedside of Europe, which suffered from



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a chronic malady. The sound parts of it must, he said, be protected against any spread of the evil. "Everything must be done," he said, "to prevent the occurrence of an acute attack."<sup>1</sup> He by no means, however, wanted a one-sided "English" solution of the differences. He was closely linked with France, and he sought as far as possible an issue which would meet the honour of both parties. He proposed a declaration of the integrity of Turkish territory and the return of Adana and "as much of Syria as possible" by Mehemed Ali.

Russia was as far as possible to be prevented from sending troops to Asia Minor, so as not to endanger the understanding with England by such a step. England could not, and would not, suffer Russian troops on the eastern shore of the Bosphorus or the Dardanelles. King Leopold tried to convince Metternich that some regard must be paid to France in solving the Eastern question. Looking to the weak side of the Chancellor, he pointed out how "for fifty years all trouble has come from this dangerous neighbour," and showed "what an impulse to the most fearful strife might again proceed from France if that mass of inflammable material were not handled carefully."<sup>2</sup> He went on, with a thrust at Palmerston, whose eventual desertion over the question of the Dutch frontier he could not forget:

The English seem often to forget this. They are really *frivolous* in their behaviour to France, and I ask your Excellency's aid. You are in a good position with them just now, and whatever advice you give will make a great impression in England. A tolerable understanding between France and England means peace, a breach means war. Hitherto, all the gain has been on the side of England. France was not suffered to annex anything. One cannot say that this pleased the ardent section of the French nation. In fact, recently the conduct of England has been very bitterly resented at Paris. Up to the present things have gone quietly, but it would be a mistake to think that *French vanity can be wounded indefinitely*

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Prince Metternich, March 25, 1840 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Metternich, March 21, 1840 (State Archives).

with impunity. *Un beau matin* we shall see something that we shall not like. It will then be too late, and no one can tell *what mischief will be done*. Your Excellency must try to mediate. No one else can do it so well, and no one could hope to have as much success in the matter.

Clearly, it was hard to awaken in Metternich a single spark of sympathy with France. He regarded it as a "lost land."

He was confirmed in this by a speech which Thiers made in the Chamber in the middle of April. "On one important point," said Thiers, "I am in conflict with the Throne. There came at length a day when, without sacrificing any conviction, we were able to accept and exercise power. We shall do all we can to bring our conviction into harmony with that of the other three powers in the State. This is what we understand by the 'Parliamentary regime.' " Metternich, indignant at the public comparison of Ministerial and Royal power in the Chamber, wrote to King Leopold :

Thiers calls his appointment as President of the Council of Ministers "*mon avènement au pouvoir*" ! How long has the head or the arm been the whole body ? How long has a Ministry, still less a Minister, been justified in calling himself *le pouvoir*, and distinguishing it from *les pouvoirs* (the King, Peers and Deputies), as if there were in the State four *pouvoirs*, and the highest of them must be the Minister ? *That* is how people talk to-day, and—what is worse—it passes unnoticed. . . . People have eyes and see not. They have ears and hear not, for the salt has lost its savour in them. That, my dear sir, and that alone, is the true situation in the whole of Western Europe. Your Majesty calls France a dangerous neighbour, and you add that what is happening there displeases you, and deserves general attention. I quite agree ; but I extend the principle beyond the present to the past. *France is a lost land* (as far as lands can be) *and a ceaseless source of misfortune for the whole of Europe*. When the foundations of order are shattered in any empire, it will take more than a lifetime to restore it to equilibrium in itself and with its neighbours. . . . Yet this State continues its baleful propaganda, *based upon the impulse to communicate its own misery to others in order to have equality*. This is the real reason of the constitutional propaganda.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter to King Leopold, April 27, 1840 (State Archives).

Metternich said of the relation of England to France that "what is called an alliance between the two countries is merely a word, not a fact, but it is better to keep the appearance of the thing and not let the inevitable rivalry of the two come to a head." In point of fact, the Chancellor had, like King Leopold, a great interest in the maintenance of peace, for he was convinced that a general European conflagration would bring with it a social upheaval and a fundamental change of the forms of government. That was the spectre that haunted Metternich, and dominated the whole course of his ideas. It is almost grotesque to see how a Minister who, with all respect for his Sovereign, ruled with nearly despotic power in Austria, and had imposed his own views and will upon the whole Continent for decades, can be indignant with Thiers for talking about his "ministerial power." Metternich, it is true, did not need a constitutional regime, giving power to Ministers. He had won such a position that a regime of that kind could not give him greater power. The Austrian Imperial Family, not itself conscious of the requisite ability, had left the reins to him.

The attitude of Thiers, however, did not make it easy for Metternich to play the part of mediator. The Tsar, on the other hand, in his Legitimist rancour against the "usurper" Louis Philippe, listened to the wishes of England and Austria, and seemed unwilling to do anything except on an understanding with them. He consented to the quadruple alliance, suggested in London, of England, Russia, Prussia, and Austria for the protection of Turkey, proposing to exclude France, maintain the *status quo* in Turkey, and compel Mehemed Ali to restore Syria to Turkey.

This had a catastrophic effect in France. The hope of a conflict of interests between Russia and Austria and England, on account of rival ambitions in the Balkans, seemed to have been dissipated. The Chamber, the

Press, and a large part of the nation broke into impotent anger. A diplomatic defeat was generally felt to be upon them, and Germany was regarded as the author of the alliance; though England had been the mainspring of the whole affair. England, however, was able to divert the anger upon Prussia, which was not entirely innocent, especially as it did not want to attract too much attention to English interests in everything that concerned Egypt.

King Leopold was in Paris at the moment when the alliance became known, and he was able to see for himself the impression which it made upon the Government and nation. He was astonished at the depth of the agitation it caused. He wrote to Metternich :

Thiers is fearfully embittered, and all the ideas of revenge and adventure that such a man can conceive are pouring out at lightning speed. In the general public the impression was enormous and, one should add, *unreasonable*. The whole thing was regarded as an alliance of the four Powers against France, which once more stands alone. The feeling even of the more moderate was—if that is the case, we shall show them that we can still fight, and so on.<sup>1</sup>

King Leopold did his best to smooth matters at Paris, but he took care to point out that it was impossible for France alone to fight against half of Europe. On the other hand, he wrote to Metternich to ask him to secure a way out of the situation for France. They ought, he thought, to say to Paris : “ You have not been able to subscribe to the coercive measures against Egypt because they seem to you to endanger the peace of Europe, but you have always said that you sincerely desire the maintenance of the Porte. Let us, then, have done with this division of the Powers, and draw up a Treaty which will for a long time secure the political existence of Turkey.” “ Do not imagine,” he said to Metternich, “ that this outburst of public opinion in France is mere

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Metternich, from Claremont, August 1840 (State Archives).



bravado. There is an element of bravado in it, but there is also a large and dangerous truth in it, and it is urgently necessary to reunite France with the four other Powers."

This message he had sent from England: certainly not in the sense of Palmerston, but in line with the ideas of the Queen and Lord Melbourne. The King's influence on his niece, which is again seen in this matter, made Lord Palmerston distrust him more than ever. The feeling was mutual, and King Leopold took little trouble to conceal it. In the profound humiliation of Louis Philippe, which Palmerston's Eastern policy had effected, he saw an indirect thrust at the son-in-law and his unwelcome influence on the English Queen.

The situation was extremely strained. In King Leopold's words to Metternich, the smallest incident might lead to a political duel between France and England. But the King did not hesitate to exaggerate whenever he wanted to frighten the Chancellor, who was very nervous about any disturbance. England itself naturally preferred a peaceful solution, with a diplomatic defeat of the other side. In his effort to preserve the peace, King Leopold had to find the solution, and proposed to Vienna to hold a conference in that city to try to induce France to abandon its policy and work with the others for the maintenance of Turkey. "There might," he wrote to Metternich, "be circumstances in which King Louis Philippe, in spite of his sincere desire for peace, would have no choice, and he must therefore not lightly be affronted." The King was less concerned about a *diplomatic* defeat of his father-in-law, but he was bound in his own interest to dread *war*; and he was determined to do everything in his power to prevent it. Metternich replied in a very long and exhaustive letter, in which he traced the origin of the Turko-Egyptian question.

He said that it was a question of settling whether the Turkish Empire was to go on or fall to the lot of one

of its vassals, and this internal dissolution of the Empire would then open up an incalculable field of disturbances of the peace of the European Powers, an arena for the combative and covetous.

But above all this is the peace of the world [he said]. It was threatened when Mehemed Ali wanted to inherit the country (especially Syria) which he occupied: that is to say, when he demanded the division of the Empire, and wanted to enforce it upon Mahmud's successor in consequence of the battle of Nisib. The impossibility of granting such a request is so deeply rooted in the nature of things that we summoned the other Powers to an understanding, to unite amongst themselves and with the Porte.<sup>1</sup>

He went on to show that neither England nor Prussia, and certainly not Austria, wanted any territorial gain from Turkey, and that even Russia, he believed, "could not think of any," unless Europe agreed to it. The sudden intervention of France, which had taken part in the collective Note of the great Powers to Mehemed Ali after the battle of Nisib, meant a sort of "blindness with eyes wide open," an outcome of the constant itching to fight the world beyond its own frontiers.

*Tout par et pour la France* [he said] sounds very nice at home, but in face of the world it is an impossibility. It complicates the simplest things, and creates difficulties where the solution should be easy. The *tout par et pour* descends from the general to the particular, until in the end the dear self of individuals takes the place of the whole.

The only possible solution was that France must give up the absolute pretension to a division of the Turkish Empire. Egypt, he thought, might be under hereditary Pashas without endangering the existence of Turkey, but not Syria, as in that case there would be no vitality left in the Porte.

Metternich did not like the idea of holding a conference at Vienna. He feared that there the conflict of Russian

<sup>1</sup> Letter to King Leopold, June 27, 1840 (State Archives).

and Austrian interests would become too acute, whereas if the conference were in London, as he proposed, it would be rather the rivalry of England and France that would be emphasised. The only solution he saw was the re-entry of France into the "concert of the great Powers." The whole question had given him much concern, but the recent unsettlement had come from that hated revolutionary France, which had already brought so much unspeakable evil on Europe. "The world is awry," the letter ends, "because it is only then that such *absurda* are possible—*absurda* which bear the mark of the *sin against the Spirit* and can never be forgiven."

Feeling in France had not been easily appeased. To the national hostility to everything German was added the violent excitement of the crisis whipped up by the Press in regard to English policy. King Leopold did not relax his efforts for peace. In September 1840 he had again gone to Wiesbaden, knowing, apparently, that King Louis Philippe would not take extreme measures. Frequently meeting Metternich's envoy, Count von Münch-Bellinghausen, and in constant communication with Paris, he let the Austrian Chancellor know that it was now only a question of finding for the French King as honourable a line of retreat as possible from the enterprise that had arrayed so many constellations against his country. King Leopold thought that England was substantially right in its procedure, but that Palmerston had "in form been too sharp with France and its King."

The Belgian King used his influence for moderation with Queen Victoria and Lord Melbourne, in opposition to the thorough-going Palmerston, who saw all the trumps in his own hand and wanted to proceed ruthlessly against France. The Queen listened to her uncle, and opposed her Foreign Minister, with whom she had already had several disagreements. This did not dispose Palmerston very amicably toward King Leopold. He had, moreover, a

personal grievance against the King's father-in-law, Louis Philippe, who had drastically opposed him on the Spanish question in 1836. His present conduct seemed to King Leopold a sort of revenge. Melbourne himself had told him this. He pressed Metternich to oppose Palmerston's design of treating France *sans ménagement*, pointing out that French youth was afire with war passion, and the King had great difficulty in restraining it. The younger French had, he said, kept quiet up to the present only because they had no mind to run their heads against a wall (*pas se briser la tête contre l'impossible*). But the present situation was far worse than 1830, and France must be helped out of its false position.

Meanwhile Queen Victoria had received from her uncle the message which Metternich had sent her. She found his proposals sagacious and sound, and thought it very desirable that France should be reconciled with England; but she considered that the country had only itself to thank for its unhappy position, and that it was quite wrong. King Leopold replied that Palmerston was going too far, because he was determined to humiliate France and wanted to set his foot on the neck of the country. He enclosed an extract from a letter of his father-in-law, saying that the French people were convinced that England wanted to reduce France to the position of a second-rate Power, whereas he (Louis Philippe) considered that "the union of England and France was the foundation of the peace of the world."

But, while Queen Victoria and Lord Melbourne were disposed to accept Metternich's formula, "Egypt for Mehemed Ali, Syria for the Sultan," Palmerston wished and hoped to eject the Viceroy from both Syria and Egypt. He saw farther than any of the others. He knew well that a time would come when England would want to establish itself in Egypt, and it would then be better to have a decrepit Turkey as ruler than a new



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dynasty of Pashas based upon military power, such as Mehemed Ali seemed likely to found.

For the time, however, this was only a wish. In practice Palmerston did not mean to go so far, as he could not succeed without the aid of Russia, and this could only be obtained by making it a great concession somewhere else in Turkey. This England was no more inclined to give than to see the French established in the East.

Prussia also adopted Metternich's formula, and, when Louis Philippe agreed, a basis was provided on which the Powers could come to an agreement with France. King Leopold's work began to bear fruit. War seemed to be averted. It only remained for him to soften the diplomatic defeat for France as far as possible. He pressed Queen Victoria to deal with Louis Philippe and listen to him, and then all would be well.

Meantime the military representatives of the four Allied Powers, especially the British naval commanders, on an understanding with Palmerston, had vigorously opposed Mehemed Ali. Beyruth was bombarded and Alexandria threatened with investment. In face of the hostility of the European Powers, the rebellious Viceroy began to yield and enter into negotiations. Hence, as the last support, Mehemed Ali, whose military strength had been greatly over-estimated in France, began to give way, Louis Philippe began to express openly his intention of abandoning warlike plans, and to signify this by dismissing Thiers, who was the soul of the design of assisting Mehemed Ali.

On October 29, 1840, Guizot, hitherto French Ambassador at London, was appointed Foreign Minister, with directions to settle the whole Egyptian question in a conciliatory way. Palmerston remained at his post, but events now rapidly moved to a conclusion. It was a great joy to King Leopold to see this peaceful solution,

which he justly ascribed in a great measure to his own efforts; but it did not leave him without anxiety. He knew that the Queen and Lord Melbourne consented to make "large concessions" to France,<sup>1</sup> but he knew also Palmerston's ruthlessness, which was the more dangerous as he "reigned like an autocrat in his department," as King Leopold said. The King desired that the whole Oriental trouble should be regulated by a formal Treaty between the five great Powers. He had sounded people in Paris, and had found the King, Soult and Guizot willing. The maintenance of Turkey was now to be guaranteed by all the Powers, including France.

Palmerston was not disposed to let Louis Philippe off so lightly, but King Leopold hoped that Austria, Prussia, and part of the British Ministers—privately he meant, mainly, the Queen and Melbourne—would carry out the plan in spite of Palmerston, or induce him to accept a general Treaty which would, in any case, put the seal on the diplomatic defeat of France. He had great hope in Melbourne, who had written him, as he said to Metternich, that "Lord Palmerston's obstinacy would not be tolerated much longer by many of his colleagues."

Palmerston wanted the war in Syria to continue for a time. He wanted to take St-Jean-d'Acre, in conjunction with Austrian troops, in order to make Mehemed Ali more pliant. King Leopold, who saw the prospect of peace endangered at the last moment, described this as "an unparalleled folly."<sup>2</sup>

It is [he said] now no longer a question of Syria alone, or of Lord Palmerston and Ponsonby [Admiral in the East], but whether we want to live in peace in Europe or to bring about social revolutions. Many people console themselves with the idea that men like Palmerston are chosen by Providence to direct crises. That

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Metternich, November 5, 1840 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Letter to the Prussian Ambassador at London, Herr von Bülow, November 7, 1840 (State Archives).

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does not help me. My opinion is that reasonable men, who, have in the end to pay the bill, blunt the edge of dangerous implements as quickly as possible when they put them into the hands of a fool.

He feared the collapse of the new French moderate Ministry :

We risk the fall of Guizot, and what will happen then ? Good God, have we all gone mad ? . . . For heaven's sake, let us end it *at once*. If you let down the present Ministry in France, I shall certainly mobilise here, and that will encourage Germany to mobilise, and, with God's help, we will bring such confusion into Europe that everything there will move, and the Communists will get their chance.

He wanted to make it clearer to Prussia how dangerous the situation was, and he therefore enclosed in his letter to Bülow an extract from a letter of Louis Philippe of November 6, 1840. In this it was said that the fall of the new Ministry meant war *à tout prix*, followed by an enlarged and improved edition of 1793. On the other hand, the maintenance of the Ministry meant peace ; but what was necessary must be done speedily, as everybody knows that "*les têtes gauloises sont mobiles*." Bülow showed the letter to Queen Victoria, who, indeed, was already informed about Louis Philippe's fears of a revolution. Palmerston, on the other hand, tried to parry these influences, and to persuade the Queen not to pay too much regard to France. He said that Louis Philippe's cries about an impending revolution were very exaggerated.

The Queen, who had for some time differed from Palmerston in various matters, replied critically, rather in the vein of King Leopold, to his remarks, but on conciliatory lines. She insisted that in this case she had the rare fortune of seeing both sides of the medal, and was therefore in a position to judge clearly and impartially. That was chiefly due to King Leopold's assiduous activity, and it,



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naturally, did not improve the relations of the King and the Minister. King Leopold also tried to make use of the Austrian Ambassador at London. He said to Count Dietrichstein in Brussels that he trusted to the moderating influence of Prince Esterhazy to check the fiery temper (*la fougue*) of Lord Palmerston. It was, he said, very sad to see how the peace of the world depended upon the impulsive and irresponsible temper of that Minister.

During the Count's audience a convenient courier brought to King Leopold a letter from Louis Philippe, and, as if casually, he read a passage of it to the Count: "I will do everything in my power to maintain peace, but let there be no mistake: if I am pushed to extremes, I shall go to war."<sup>1</sup> Meantime, on November 25th, the news of the taking of St-Jean-d'Acre by English and Austrian marines reached Brussels. Metternich was very pleased, and still more pleased when he heard of the fall of Thiers. The Egyptian question had for some time not greatly preoccupied him, as, to use his own words, "in the revolutionary field" tranquillity could not be restored at once. The fate of Thiers in face of the expulsion of Mehemed Ali from Syria by the four Powers gave the Chancellor an opportunity to make some drastic observations on the policy of the French Foreign Minister. He wrote to King Leopold:

If there ever was a reckoning without the host, it was this; and the reckoner is not ashamed to put it before his own country and Europe. France has assumed a most dangerous attitude under the late Ministry. If the King does not perceive it, if he supports that attitude, in order to win a popularity that can never be won in that way, the Throne will go, and with it the last restraint in the country. The large armament is a living danger. A central empire like France cannot be the *only one* to arm. Its example is bound to be followed by its neighbours, and what is the limit of its neighbours? It means pressure on the nation, and such

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Count Dietrichstein to Metternich, November 16, 1840 (State Archives).

## INTERVENTION IN EASTERN AFFAIRS

pressure means war! I trust the King thinks like myself and all reasonable people on that point, and in that case there may be an improvement, and things may even be better than before the deluge (for M. Thiers is very much of a flood).<sup>1</sup>

In the end even Palmerston was persuaded, especially by pointing to Russia, to regard the return of France as an adequate expiation of its false step. France was a fifth Power in the Treaty for the maintenance of Turkey. Mehemed Ali received Egypt and Nubia as an hereditary viceroyalty for himself and his descendants. Syria was given back to Turkey; and the five Powers finally united, in the Dardanelles Treaty of July 13, 1841, about the other questions that had arisen in the east, especially the closing of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus against the warships of all nations and the integrity of the Turkish Empire.

For France and its King the issue was, of course, a failure and a diplomatic defeat; and it was felt the more deeply as the plan had represented the first attempt of France to recover the place in the concert of the Powers which it had lost in 1815 and to have a say in great European questions beyond its own frontiers. For King Leopold, however, the issue was a considerable success. It did not matter so much that Louis Philippe had sustained a more or less veiled diplomatic defeat; the point was that his Throne remained secure, and war between England and France was avoided. The King, who was interested in both States, had had to face the danger of such a war being waged in his own territory. In that event, in spite of all his relationships, the independence of Belgium would be threatened, or part of the country would suffer.

This success was the more estimable as Queen Victoria was much more difficult to lead than had been supposed. She had shown this in 1839. Indignantly repudiating

<sup>1</sup> Metternich to King Leopold, December 5, 1840 (State Archives).

## COOLNESS WITH QUEEN VICTORIA

the possibility of influence, she had written with some spirit to her husband shortly after their marriage :

I have to-day received an ungracious letter from Uncle Leopold. He seems to be vexed because I no longer ask his advice ; but my dear uncle is disposed to believe that he has been chosen to dominate everything. That is not exactly necessary.

The consequence was that King Leopold, who very probably heard these things from his nephew, and had from other quarters heard of the distrust of the English Ministers, with Palmerston at their head, had become more reserved and prudent ; though he was by no means inclined to give up his position in England without a struggle. It had succeeded very well with his niece. She had, it is true, written the above words in a moment of irritation, but she was not easy to manage.

In the solution of the Oriental question it had been seen that the interest of King Leopold, in the avoidance of war, coincided with the interest of Europe generally, indeed of the whole of civilisation. The King was only too right when, in the course of his efforts to prevent it, he wrote to Metternich :

In view of the condition of social sickness from which Europe suffers, the Communists regarding the bourgeois as an intolerable burden, quite trivial things, alterations in the Treaty itself, might bring on a great war, which would turn into a war of opinions. To confine it to Mehemed would be impossible. I do not say it in order to strengthen my own proposals, but, as far as I know Europe, I believe that its entire social form and organisation would be transformed and shattered by such a struggle.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter of November 5, 1840 (State Archives)



## *Chapter VII*

### *THE REVOLUTION OF 1848*

**C**OMPARATIVE TRANQUILLITY reigned in higher European politics after the storm in the East. Attention slowly turned in every State from foreign politics to internal conditions, where there were already clear signs of the development of the germs of the movements which convulsed the whole of Europe in 1848. France alone endeavoured to efface the impression of its diplomatic reverse by pursuing with all its energy, and with a certain truculence, its expedition in Algiers, which had taken a dangerous turn owing to the obstinate resistance of some of the Arab tribes.

On the Continent France now sought to obtain an economic hold on Belgium instead of the political control which England had prevented. This was to be done by inducing Belgium to enter into a far-reaching customs-union with France, which would have the effect of turning the two countries into one large economic province. The idea was to prepare the way for an ultimate political incorporation, and to show the Belgians that the connection with France would be greatly to their economic advantage. The negotiations, which were begun early in 1841, were followed with much distrust in England. The English Ambassador at Brussels was instructed to tell the Belgian Government that the British saw with "extreme displeasure" any such negotiations of Belgium with France.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Count Dietrichstein to Metternich, January 2, 1841 (State Archives).

## INTERVENES IN ENGLISH POLITICS

King Leopold was on his guard. Although he was not on good terms with Lord Palmerston, whom he would like to see out of the Foreign Office, he was as indisposed as ever to sacrifice his independence, and that of his country, out of affection for his father-in-law. He therefore directed his Foreign Minister, Lebeau, to reply that he would endeavour to secure every possible commercial advantage for his country, but one might be sure that the independence of Belgium was with him a first principle.

Some of the English Ministers, however, greatly distrusted King Leopold since the Oriental affair. With Palmerston they felt that the King had too much of the ear of his niece. This was the more important as at the time Melbourne's Whig Ministry was insecure, on account of the financial difficulties and the bad condition of trade. King Leopold wished to see the Melbourne Ministry replaced in power by a moderate Conservative Cabinet, as in that event he trusted to lose his perpetual antagonist, Lord Palmerston. He advised Queen Victoria to choose such a Ministry without dissolving Parliament or bringing on a new election; as he feared that the Whigs might get a larger majority at the polls.<sup>1</sup>

The Queen, who was at that time wholly under the influence of the Whig Premier, Melbourne, as regards home politics, adhered then to the Whigs—against the advice of King Leopold, who always recommended to her the detachment of the Throne from all parties, on his own example—and *hoped* from the dissolution of Parliament precisely what the King feared. She therefore rejected her uncle's advice; and he gave Count Dietrichstein a very strong criticism of her action:

Yes, the retiring Whig Cabinet is guilty of a crime. It is committing an infamy! The dissolution of Parliament will endanger

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Dietrichstein to Metternich, January 2, 1841 (State Archives).

the entire future of the Queen, inexperienced in affairs, as she is, and too ready to rely on the selfish counsels of her Ministers at the time.

He meant, of course, especially Lord Palmerston, who, in the King's words, clung to this dissolution as "the last plank of his ministerial existence"; as he had nothing to lose but his place.

Alarmed at the turn of events in England, the Belgian King went to see his niece at Windsor. He could not prevent the dissolution of Parliament, but the result of the elections was astonishing. Contrary to the fears of King Leopold and the hopes of the Queen, the Conservatives, with their protectionist tariff on corn, won a victory. Sir Robert Peel was head of the new Government, and Lord Aberdeen took the lead of Foreign Affairs from Palmerston. Thus, although the Queen had not followed her uncle's advice, all had happened as he wished. On his return he said to Count Dietrichstein :

There is a sort of Providence in the solution. But let us bow also to the good spirit and excellent character of John Bull, which helped the good cause. In France a question like that of the Corn Law would have been like a bone cast to a lot of half-famished dogs. The English are not so easily excited. It takes a certain time for the poison to work on these powerfully organised and not very impressionable natures.<sup>1</sup>

The King knew to whom he was speaking, and what were the political views of Metternich and Count Dietrichstein. On that account he laid more stress on his Conservative ideas than was really justified, though his great satisfaction at the result of the English election showed that he was always a Conservative at heart. But he did not at all like the fact that his niece had taken so pronouncedly partisan a share in the whole business. He said to the Count :

The Queen made a great mistake, and her advisers committed a political crime in representing their ruler as a zealous partisan, the

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Dietrichstein to Metternich, July 20, 1841 (State Archives).

supreme head of their party. I have spoken about it with the leading representatives of every party. The Duke of Wellington, Lord Grey and Lord Brougham are agreed that if the [Liberal] Ministry had won, England would have found itself on a steep incline, and would have gone down into the abyss at an incalculable speed. The power of the Throne in England since the Reform Act is not so much in public conviction as in traditional sentiment. If the Melbourne Ministry had triumphed, the Conservative party would have received a death-blow in the Lower House. The Whig Ministry, which has been in power for years owing to the support of the Tories, would for the future have called up its new auxiliaries. The Radicals would have ruled through the Whigs. As the Duke of Wellington said to me, it would then not have been possible to stem the democratic torrent for many years.

In his own country at that time King Leopold had every reason to frown upon too advanced movements. In November 1841 a Republican-Orange plot was discovered in Brussels. It combined the two apparently contradictory tendencies, and it was to have been put into action during the September festival, but was postponed. In the Tivoli, a public garden situated between the Royal Palace at Laeken and the city of Brussels, they had found arms and ammunition. Certain retired Generals seem to have been in the conspiracy, and had to be arrested. The subsequent inquiry had detected such serious threads leading to Holland that, as he had told Count Dietrichstein, the King believed that the Dutch King was at least indirectly concerned: that the movement was thoroughly Orangeist, and that a provisional republican regime was to be set up only until the return of the Oranges.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, King Leopold continued to take a very wide interest in foreign policy. Even affairs in the Far East, in Afghanistan and China, occupied him. On the Indian frontier, the focus of antagonistic Russian and English interests, English policy had received a check. During a rising at Cabul the English envoy was murdered, and it was necessary to send 16,000 men. King Leopold

<sup>1</sup> Letter quoted in the preceding note.



had warned Melbourne and Palmerston, who had promoted the expedition, and had said that it was against England's interest to send troops beyond the Indus.<sup>1</sup> The mishap vindicated King Leopold's advice at the time; though the British troops afterwards exacted complete satisfaction.

The King also disapproved of British action in China. He thought that it was a very questionable matter. England saw a grave prejudice to its trade in the Chinese prohibition of the import of opium, and it entered upon a war with China that only closed successfully in 1842. It is characteristic that King Leopold gave his advice against both these adventurous-looking expeditions. He was very reserved and prudent himself in such matters, never liking to take up things of which one could not see the issue. For this reason he had never developed any enthusiasm for a project of founding a Belgian colony in South America, which he had conceived long ago.

Amidst all these concerns the King never forgot the interest of his family. His care to plant some member of it wherever a possible opportunity offered itself reminds one of the Napoleonic touch, the Emperor's custom of using his power to place members of his family as rulers wherever he could. But, while the victorious Emperor could do this by a single word, supported by his strength, the Belgian King had to effect his purpose by the shrewd and diplomatic arrangement of marriages. It was a different and more difficult way, but the success was really astonishing.

In order to give his family as high a rank as possible, and so facilitate the marriages, he supported the pretensions of his relatives to the external privileges of Royal Houses. Metternich, ever a zealous guardian of tradition, opposed this, when Prince Ferdinand of Coburg, who was serving in the Austrian Army, wanted to take

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Archduke John, March 22, 1842 (State Archives).

precedence at Vienna over the English and French Ambassadors, and to assume the title "Royal Highness." King Leopold tried in vain to win the Chancellor's consent. In the end he agreed that the Belgian King might call his brothers "Royal Highnesses" if he liked, but Metternich would only recognise this within the frontiers of Belgium, not at the Vienna Court. In things which concerned ancient prerogatives and rights, Metternich would have no innovation, no change of old customs, even as regards these ridiculously trivial externals.

In France the eldest son of Louis Philippe, the brilliant and beloved Duc de Chartres, was fatally injured on July 13, 1842, by a fall from his carriage, the horses of which had got out of control. He left a son, a minor, the Comte de Paris; and, as Louis Philippe was now advanced in years, it was unlikely that this son would accede to the throne without a Regency. The Regent would presumably be the next son of the French King, the Duc de Nemours, who was married to Leopold's niece. Thus the mishap brought the Belgian King nearer to an influence over the ruler of France after the death of Louis Philippe.

He went at once to Paris to console his father-in-law, and to talk with the Duc de Nemours, whom he took to be a man of courage and energy. From Paris he wrote to Archduke John :

A good point is the unity of the family, especially as regards the four surviving brothers. As they have every confidence in me, I hope to be useful. France has for fifty years, like the box of Pandora, poured out so much upon us. To prevent evil there is much the same thing as to avert it from Europe.<sup>1</sup>

In the accident itself Leopold saw the finger of God, preparing the way for him to have a decisive influence at Paris in the future! Very clearly, his heart was thoroughly subject to his head.

<sup>1</sup> Letter of August 8, 1842 (State Archives).

Meantime, the negotiations for a Gallo-Belgian treaty of commerce went on simultaneously with arrangements for a similar treaty with Prussia. England was much concerned, and it stormed Metternich with requests to make representations at Brussels against a tariff union with France. Metternich did not hesitate to take up a vigorous attitude in face of little Belgium, and, when Count Dietrichstein had acted for him in this sense at the beginning of 1843, King Leopold replied that it was unjust to attempt to deprive his young State of things indispensable to its life.<sup>1</sup> If his people could not realise the material union, they would eventually demand a political union. Prussia had not made satisfactory concessions.

Yet [said the King to Count Dietrichstein], that country and mine may be regarded as one in the event of a war with France: the cathedral at Cologne and the city of Brussels would certainly be common objectives of French covetousness. Who can tell better than I what menaces the independence of Belgium, or might menace it? And it is my place above all others to see that it is uninjured. I repeat that our country is not French. You must have seen that yourself on many occasions.

Dietrichstein thought otherwise. It is true that he wrote to Metternich that after eight years in the country he sought in vain a national spirit. Belgian nationality, he said, was entirely negative; but the undeniable antipathy to France was certainly not as strong as the national feeling against Prussia. In the event of war the masses would be on the side of France; and a man falls to the side toward which he leans. From France revolution and anarchy would pass to Belgium.

The truth was that Belgium leaned to neither side. It wanted to remain quiet and independent. There was a good deal of dissatisfaction with Dietrichstein in the country. His constant interference in the country's

<sup>1</sup> Count Dietrichstein to Metternich, January 4, 1843 (State Archives).

domestic and foreign affairs had given general annoyance. On one occasion the *Journal de Liège* said :

Austria has selected out of its great patrician families, to send to us, a man who is not the most suitable possible. He has at command the jargon which it is necessary to use in aristocratic drawing-rooms, but that is the whole of his intellectual outfit. Belgium is a profound mystery to this gentleman. He at first lived almost exclusively in the atmosphere of the Orange salon, took no notice of the customs and needs of the country, and regarded Belgium as something merely temporary. He showed a sort of haughtiness for the little nation that had, in its national impertinence, taken the liberty of dissolving the amalgamation with Holland dictated by the Holy Alliance in 1815. He treats with our Minister of Foreign Affairs like a *grand seigneur* who deigns to unbend in an intimate talk.

This is, beyond question, an echo of what was being said in ministerial circles. Dietrichstein reported the fact to Vienna, and felt that he was unjustly treated ; but he became a little more cautious and less outspoken about the country to which he was accredited. The criticism, which very fairly represented the facts, gives us an idea of the powerful position that Austria then had on the Continent.

In all his efforts to maintain their independence King Leopold neglected nothing that could promote the economic interests of his subjects. He knew very well that his popularity would grow in proportion to their welfare. As he wrote to Metternich : " My Belgians are particularly positive, and diminished returns are a real torture to them." At length a solution was found. At the end of 1844 a commercial treaty was concluded with the German *Zollverein*, and in July 1846 this was followed by a treaty with France. It did not embody a tariff union, but it greatly promoted trade between the two countries.

Meantime, however, the passions excited in England and France over the Oriental question had scarcely died down when the antagonism was renewed apropos of the



Spanish marriage. Since its intervention in Spain France had not ceased to give effect to its determination to have a predominant position in the Pensinsula. Queen Isabella II, who reached maturity in 1843, was to be married, and the statesmen of Europe had hitherto tried in vain to provide the Princess with a suitable mate, one who would not threaten the interests of any great Power. There were many interested, but France and England were, naturally, the most closely affected. England was determined not to admit a Bourbon candidate, and wanted to find a man with some sort of relation to itself.

Once more a Coburger was suggested. King Leopold worked assiduously to improve his own position and that of his family in Western Europe. He already had nephews in the highest places in England and Portugal, and his niece was married to one of the sons of the French King, who was also his father-in-law. There was now a prospect in Spain of arranging a Coburg marriage, as both the Queen and the Infanta were unmarried. He thought of his nephew Leopold, brother of the King of Portugal and the Duchesse de Nemours.

This candidature, which would rather favour English influence in Spain, did not please the French. A lengthy correspondence between London and Paris led at last, when Queen Victoria and Louis Philippe met in the French capital, to an agreement that the Queen could not marry a Bourbon, and that the Infanta must not be affianced to the Duc de Montpensier until the Queen was married and had children ; and England must promise neither to recognise nor support the candidature of the Coburger.

In spite of all the official promises, however, each side unofficially pushed its own candidate, though England was keener on the contract because the chief thing was, not to have a Coburger in Madrid, but to prevent a Bourbon from going there. King Leopold

quite understood this, and, although he regretted that he could not attempt too openly to secure this new brilliant prospect for his family, he felt that the danger of a fresh clash between England and France would threaten his own Throne. He remained rather passive. He learned, it is true, that in Paris there was a wish, for some reason or other, to get out of the engagement with England, but he did not want to press the candidature of his nephew too openly. He therefore did not even inform his niece at Windsor, as he had no intention of exalting his nephew at the cost of his own Throne. The Queen and Prince Albert would have preferred to see their Coburg relative on the Spanish throne, but, if France refused to agree, they left it to a Spaniard. A Bourbon they would not have.

Then Louis Philippe ventured to remove the veil from his designs and confront England with a *fait accompli* which practically amounted to a breach of treaty. He had learned of Palmerston's telegram to the English Ambassador at Madrid, in which Leopold of Coburg was named, with others, as a candidate. The French King said that this sufficed to prove that England had not abandoned that candidate, as it had promised, so that he in turn need not adhere strictly to the arrangement. Through French influence, the hand of the young Queen, Isabella II, was given to her cousin, Francis of Assisi; though he was so weak, mentally and physically, that it was almost certain that he would have no descendants. At the same time, therefore, the Infanta Louise, the Queen's younger sister and the next heir to the throne, was married to Louis Philippe's son, the Duc de Montpensier. Thus they accomplished what England would prevent at any price. The immediate expectation of the Spanish throne passed to a Bourbon, and the opportunity for French influence in Spain was created.

The facts excited the greatest indignation in England.

Queen Victoria especially was very angry, and she did not spare her words in her reply to the French Queen and her various letters to King Leopold. The Belgian King himself found no consolation in the action of his father-in-law. It completely shattered his hopes for a member of the Coburg family. He did not, however, regret that he had not been more active in assisting the English plan against that of Louis Philippe, as he would rather lose influence in Spain than see his own Kingdom threatened by a war between England and France. Although there was to be no Coburger in Spain, he could always talk to the Madrid Court indirectly through his relatives at Paris, as long as these exercised influence in Spain. That is how King Leopold must have conceived the further development. At first, on account of England, he showed some coldness in dealing with his father-in-law, but in November 1846 he sought once more to reconcile his angry niece with Louis Philippe. It was by no means easy, as Palmerston fostered her indignation.

Thus a link failed in the chain of Coburg marriages which was to spread over Europe, as King Leopold designed—a design which once led Bismarck to speak of the Coburg family as the “stud-farm of Europe.” Whether that was fortunate for the young Queen and her distracted country is at least questionable. Under the lead of a Coburger, of sound mind and body, attractive, related to both the English and the French Courts, she would not have become the prey of one lover after another, and the various parties and pretenders would not have had such unrestricted licence to harass the country.

The task of watching that no Frenchmen should come to rule in Spain passed later to Prussia, under William I and Bismarck. Indeed, the struggle to place a Hohenzollern prince on the Spanish throne was the occasion of the war of 1870-1. The French dream of predom-

ance in Spain had lingered from the days of Napoleon I. Louis Philippe was a Chauvinist in foreign politics when, in 1846, he brought about the Spanish marriage at the risk of a grave conflict with England. Had he not been displaced in 1848 England would have found a way to defeat his successful move in Spain. But the situation did not change much with a Napoleonic dynasty in Spain. It was not to secure the long-desired position in the Peninsula.

Nor could it attain such a position in Belgium. To prevent this England in 1870 needed no exertions of its own. It left the task to Germany; and the fact that German blood was spent to keep the French eagle from spreading its talons north and south was no slight advantage to England.

In the period following 1846 King Leopold had more than enough to do in smoothing the antagonisms and resentments that had been provoked and in moderating English policy, which was now acutely anti-French. He did not entirely succeed, but it would have been better, not merely for Spain, but for the peace of Europe and the security of the French Throne itself, if his plan had been adopted, and the Spanish Queen had married his nephew. The repute of the Coburg family, its skill in governing, and the shrewdness, healthiness and strength of its Princes were widely recognised in Europe. King Leopold was delighted when a rich and influential American from New York told him that many of his countrymen would much prefer "a monarchy instead of the misrule of mobs as they had it, and that he wished very much some branch of the Coburg family might be disposable for such a place."<sup>1</sup> No doubt there was in this a good deal of democratic flattery of the King, but it is remarkable that an American should choose this form of flattery.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Queen Victoria, December 15, 1843 (*Letters*, I, 640).



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King Leopold's international position—which was the more remarkable as he was merely the sovereign of the smallest and most recently formed State in Europe—and the whole course of his development were such that no nation could properly claim him as its own. He was cosmopolitan in the highest sense of the word. The remark of the Duc de Broglie to Queen Victoria—that King Leopold was very much English and a little French—to which the Queen assented, is distinctly questionable. It would be a more accurate description of his actual development to say that he was no longer a German, but also no longer an Englishman; and that he had never in the least been a Frenchman. His efforts to keep England and France on good terms were due rather to a desire to guard his Throne and country from the danger which threatened them in case the two Powers went to war. They were more influenced by the belief that a great European war would favour anarchy instead of Royalty and peace in Europe generally than by any pronounced feeling for England or less pronounced feeling for France. His relationships did the rest. “The place of Belgium in the world,” Count Woyna wrote to Metternich from Brussels at the beginning of 1848, “depends solely upon the King's relationships.”

Metternich, who was second to none in diplomatic skill and experience, had often corresponded intimately with King Leopold, but he was very far from putting real political confidence in the King. He knew to what a large extent Leopold intervened in higher European politics, and, when Count Woyna once asked that he should be informed as to the real course of things, so that he could utilise the peculiar position of the Belgian King to the advantage of Austria, Metternich wrote on the margin of his letter :

I will not do this, as the disadvantages are more numerous than the advantages. If King Leopold were quite reliable, it would



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be well to give him a few words. As he is not, it is better to be silent, as talking would only lead to mischief.<sup>1</sup>

Metternich was severe in his judgment and distrust. It is true that King Leopold made use of confidential communications, but with such prudence that one could not exactly speak of "abuse"; otherwise he could never have attained the position he actually held in Europe. In any case, the principles of his policy were always in the interest of peace and order; and a closer study of his intentions might have spared Metternich, who could not abandon the functions of mentor, many a painful disillusion.

While the attention of King Leopold was absorbed in his concern about the relations of England and France, there had occurred in Eastern Europe certain important events which came of the Tsar's growing desire to improve the position of Russia in Europe by a vigorous foreign policy. In the West the King's shrewdness and perseverance had slowly won a considerable position for him, and had almost entirely overcome the objections of Prussia and Austria to his "illegitimist kingdom." But he had, in spite of his earlier service in the Russian Army, not advanced a single step with the Tsar. The great revolt of the Poles of 1830-1 had taken place just at the time when Belgium was born of a revolution. When Russia bloodily suppressed the insurrection, many of the compromised Polish fugitives had turned to more fortunate Belgium, where the revolution had, thanks to the forces set in motion by the jealousy of France and England, ended in the attainment of freedom.

This birth of a kingdom of the revolution was an abomination to the Tsar; and the sheltering of Poles in Belgium and France deeply embittered him against the two countries. These strained relations with Russia were painful

<sup>1</sup> Report of Count Woyna from Brussels, August 13, 1848 (State Archives).



to the Belgian King. He wanted to be recognised there also ; to be able to spin his threads at the Russian Court, as at others. An important stone was missing from his pedestal. Although Russia's attitude hurt his pride, he repeatedly sought, for practical reasons, to make the Tsar more amenable.

Once, in 1842, when he met the King of Prussia he spoke to him about a *rapprochement* with Russia ; as the King was the Tsar's brother-in-law, and there seemed to be some hope of attaining his object. Apparently, however, he received bad news about the Tsar's mood in regard to Belgium, as he wrote, with a certain malice, that the Prussian king said to him that the Tsar must be judged differently from others ; that one must bear in mind his position, and that he was considering whether to let it be known, by ukase, that it was his intention for the future to have his image venerated as a god, as the Roman emperors did, taking rank immediately after the Holy Ghost !

It was only a pose when King Leopold, during a conversation with Count Dietrichstein in 1843, said that the Tsar was wrong in treating him as a revolutionary and forgetting his military service in the Russian Army. The King added, with some irritation : " I will make no advances to the Tsar : my dignity requires that I should *laisser venir*." He did precisely the opposite.

Prussian mediation being of no use, King Leopold tried English. When the Tsar visited England in June 1844 he sent through Baron Stockmar a request to Lord Aberdeen, the Foreign Minister, to speak with the Russian monarch about the possibility of a reconciliation with Belgium. The Tsar replied that he would willingly comply with the wishes of the Queen, that he should be on good terms with her uncle, but that it was quite impossible, seeing that King Leopold took rebellious Poles under his protection. Everything, therefore, depended

## THE REVOLT IN GALICIA

upon the King adopting a different attitude toward the Poles. When he had done this diplomatic relations would be resumed between his country and Russia.

This he would not at first do. But in 1846 the Polish question became acute once more. When the Polish provinces were divided at the Vienna Congress between Russia, Prussia, and Austria, it was found impossible to agree upon the fate of Cracow. As generally happens in such cases, the matter ended in the quite absurd solution of creating a "Free State" of Cracow under the the protection of Austria, Russia and Prussia. This "Free State," with its national memories and tombs of earlier Polish Kings, was, naturally, the chief centre of all the Polish patriots who aimed at restoring the unity and independence of the country. An insurrection was planned at Cracow in 1836, and in 1846 the Polish efforts at resurrection were renewed in the same city, with the consequence that Russia and Austria intervened, and Cracow was finally incorporated in the Austrian Empire.

Simultaneously with the revolt at Cracow, the Polish nobles of Galicia had planned an insurrection, to throw off the Austrian yoke. But the titled landowners had not reckoned with the hatred that had accumulated for centuries in their serfs, who were mostly Ruthenians. These, instead of rising, fell upon the landowners. Many were killed, and a number of mansions were burned. For the Austrian monarchy, which otherwise slept so peacefully under the astute policy of Metternich, this was a terrible event, a dire omen of things to come. "There is not in human history," said the Chancellor angrily, "on such a scale, a more abandoned, God-forsaking and misanthropic outburst than this blood-stained tragedy in our peaceful Empire." But, in the circumstances, he highly praised the conduct of the peasants. The aged Chancellor was not so much con-

cerned about the interests of the nobles as about the preservation of Austria, *his* Austria. He wrote :

Our Galician peasants, differently from the Poles, call themselves *subjects of the Emperor*. When, at the appointed hour, many of the landowners summoned them to rise and strike down all who were *not Poles*, they refused. When the conspirators tried to force them by bad treatment, they did it under protest ; but when a couple of hot-heads killed peasants with pistol-shots, they fell upon their persecutors, and killed those who would not yield. That is the whole story of what happened in the Tarnowa district.<sup>1</sup>

Metternich had written this account of events to the Belgian King because he feared many of the fugitives would fly to Belgium, and from there would be able to pour oil on the fires in Poland. He feared the same in regard to France. But King Leopold cleverly allayed his apprehensions.<sup>2</sup> He said that he was very much astonished at the revolutionary movement, passed lightly over the question of Polish refugees in Belgium, and remarked that in France "there was, even amongst the common people, a very wide and marked sympathy with the Poles." The Poles had fought with the French during the Revolution and the Empire, and had made the Revolution of 1830 the starting-point of a new revolt. The King added that there was no question of expelling the Poles from France. He knew, and Thiers had repeatedly assured him, that the Poles were a serious obstacle in the way of an understanding between France and Russia, and that the idea of sacrificing the Polish fugitives to a Russian alliance was beset, for the present at least, with very formidable difficulties.

The opinion which the Belgian King expressed on the rising in Galicia was, of course, adapted to the mental attitude of his correspondent. Discussing the event, he went on to make an emphatic disavowal of anarchist conditions. "Anarchy," he said, "always devours its

<sup>1</sup> Letter to King Leopold, March 31, 1846 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Metternich, April 21, 1846 (State Archives).

immediate progenitors, and, melancholy as it may be to live amongst such things, the experience is often necessary." Metternich could not do much after receiving this amiable letter from the King. But between the lines he could read, in spite of all the friendliness, that it was the business of France and Belgium to decide how they should behave toward the Poles who took refuge in them. On the other hand, the Chancellor could see that King Leopold was, in his own interest, not at all disposed to give protection to anarchist or revolutionary movements from within his own State.

When King Leopold discussed the Galician revolt with Count Woyna, who had succeeded Count Dietrichstein at Brussels, he said that the higher nobles ought to be used more than the officials, who were too much infected with the spirit of Liberalism, even in the administrative work of the provinces (in this case, Galicia). Woyna replied, very characteristically, that he saw the advantage of using men who were devoted to the Imperial House, but pointed out that protracted study at the universities was needed for an administrative career. The young men, he said, with their inherited wealth and position, were less disposed to apply themselves zealously and perseveringly to this study than the sons of officials, who had only this way of maintaining their positions.

The Galician revolt and the movement in Cracow and Poland were premonitory symptoms of the great storm of the year 1848. In the course of 1847 the signs of discontent and of brooding ideas of revolt became very numerous. It was felt on every side that there was a storm coming. In Belgium, however, there was far less ground for discontent, far less desire of revolutionary change, than anywhere else in Europe. Its territorial situation made it a clearing-house for commerce, especially for England's trade with the Continent, and, in spite of the low taxes, its finances were in perfectly good order.



## THE REVOLUTION OF 1848

The King had at his disposal a well-organised army and body of *gendarmérie*, which kept order, and a better railway system than any other country in Europe then had. It is one of the chief accomplishments of the King that he was one of the first to perceive the very great importance of railways in the promotion of commerce, industry and culture, and he promoted the construction of them with all the means at his command.

In his own country, therefore, at least, King Leopold could await the future in comparative tranquillity and have confidence in his subjects. The words which he once wrote to the Archduke John applied to his own land :

Men can obey very well, and it does them good ; but in that case the commands must be prudently issued.

## Chapter VIII

### THE INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT OF BELGIUM

THE INTERNAL condition of the various States came more and more into the foreground. King Leopold carefully watched the development in his own realm, ready to adapt himself to every contingency. As early as April 1845 he had written to the Archduke :

Here we suffer from ultra-democratic forms ; which is a pity, because, although it loves freedom, this country is *not* democratic.

Since that time, however, the King had begun to put a little water in his wine, and, even if it cost him some struggle inwardly, to adapt himself to the advancing ideas. Not so Metternich, who would not hear of innovations either in foreign or domestic politics. The Chancellor, now in his seventy-sixth year, had become, or had remained, quite unteachable in the last phase of his brilliant career. Yet he might have learned something from King Leopold's attitude on questions of domestic policy ; especially as both of them, in the long run, had much the same sentiments and convictions, although the King enjoyed the repute, in his day, of being a liberal ruler. Certainly, the ways by which they sought to attain their ends were quite different, and it was owing to these that the revolutionary storms which swept away the Chancellor only strengthened the Throne of the King.

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The domestic policy of Belgium was influenced by the struggle of two great parties, the Catholics and the Liberals. Since 1834 the Minister de Theux Muelenaere, who favoured the Clericals, had held power ; but he had many a conflict with the advancing Liberals, who utilised various parts of the Belgian Constitution in their interest. From 1840 to 1847 Liberals and Catholics succeeded each other in power. In the latter year, in which the revolutionary movement broke over Europe, the Liberals took office, and, strengthened by the events of the following year and the movement for liberty throughout the world, held it until 1852.

There is a good indication of the character of the King in his prudent reserve, which was not a little due to a certain lack of passion. He was not in the least nervous. He had from the start held aloof, officially and publicly, from the Parliamentary struggle. He had kept a free hand, and had been independent, not only of the two great parties, but also of the small ultra-Radical and ultra-Conservative fractions detached from them. As his nephew, Ernest II, Duke of Saxe-Coburg, relates, he used to say, humorously, that he was not married to any party in the State. "I am extraordinarily devoid of party-feeling," he wrote to Queen Victoria, "but I will always be just as watchful." He carefully watched any tendency of either party that was detrimental to the peace and security of the country or was likely to enfeeble the Royal authority.

When anything of this kind occurred—and we have an instance in the manœuvres of the extreme wing of the Catholic party—he generally worked against the tendency secretly by means of his connections, which put all kinds of threads in his hands, and he exploited the special character of those to whom he turned. It goes without saying that, when he wanted to attain any object in this way, he cleverly made use of the particular hobby horse

that was ridden in the country whose aid he needed. His letters to Metternich, for instance, are couched in the most Conservative language that could be used.

Even in these cases, however, his remarks on Constitution and Liberalism were too characteristic to fail to show, to some extent, that King Leopold was more easy-going in his real Conservative sentiments. In writing to the Archduke John, his confidential friend, he did not entirely omit to have regard to the dominant sentiments of the Austrian Government, but he knew the Archduke to be a man of progressive sympathies, with ideas of his own, which very frequently clashed with those of the ruling class at Vienna. It is in these letters that he gives a free expression of his views; and there is many an attack upon innovators. In 1846, for instance, he wrote to his friend, speaking of the condition of the country:

Here we have a quite superfluous struggle of Catholics and anti-Catholics. The former are our most fervent Nationalists; the latter rather stand for the system of the late King William. There is a good deal of childishness on both sides. We should, however, suffer little from it if we had not to have a Parliamentary election every two years. Our Constitution is absurd.<sup>1</sup>

He meant that the Catholics had, through the Liberal tenor of the Constitution, played into the hands of their opponents, the Liberals. At the time of the drafting of the Constitution, at the Congress of 1831, the Catholics had had a large majority, and had imagined that they would remain the majority, and therefore the rights given them against the King, by the Constitution, would be used entirely in their interest. Since that time the Liberal party had greatly increased its strength, and it made use of the freedom of the Constitution to its own advantage.

In England, again, King Leopold preferred to see a Tory Ministry and a Tory majority in the Commons, rather than the Whigs. In 1847 a Whig Ministry was in power;

<sup>1</sup> Letter of April 17, 1846 (Meran Archives).



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though in the early part of the year Parliament had had a large Conservative majority. When that was lost, the position of the Liberal Ministry improved, but the change gave King Leopold some concern. He thought that Peel had pushed his innovations "rather hastily," and was therefore responsible for the loss of the Conservative majority. The King did not like the Liberal Ministers. To the Archduke John he wrote :

The present English Ministry is, in the very nature of things, rather favourable to revolutions and all sorts of confusions. On the other hand, the present French Ministry is Conservative, in the best sense of the word ; hence it is of more consequence to the Continent to maintain this, and to keep France quiet. Unfortunately, there is, in view of the regrettable disappearance of the Conservative majority in England, no hope of seeing a Conservative organisation there for some time. I think this a great misfortune.

His attitude was, however, dictated by a far-seeing and deliberate survey of the situation, by a natural understanding of men and great gifts as a statesman. Near, as he was, to the " Pandora box," as he called France, he had to be careful, and to check in his own country tendencies which, if they were not countered, would threaten his Throne. He was just as much concerned about the peaceful prosperity of his country as about the security of his own position. But he considered that this security was not attained by supporting one party, the Conservative party supported by all monarchs except the English. He let their rivals take over the helm of the State, convinced that the parties opposed to the Liberals would, perhaps with the secret support of the Throne, provide an effective brake in case of need. He persisted in this attitude against the advice of others, especially of his father-in-law Louis Philippe, who was much disturbed that the Belgian Government permitted the holding of a Liberal Congress at Brussels in 1846. He wanted King Leopold to disperse it.

The Austrian Ambassador at Brussels quite failed to understand the King's attitude. He wrote to Metternich :

Conservatism and the monarchical principle, with the support of the Army, could check the rising flood of Communism. I do not understand the attitude of people here. The Liberals are blind. Communism will swallow them up, if they do not cease to mix with the dregs of the people and lower themselves to the level of the proletariat. They will then fall among the other ruins of the modern social order, for the disintegration of which they are working, while they make professions of reform and emancipation. Journalists, lawyers, and people of that kind have everything to gain. The Communist idea has not yet taken root in Belgium, say those who think they can avert a danger by refusing to see it. The idea, perhaps ; but the disorderly claims of the poorer classes, daily recruited by thousands of idlers who demand high wages, yet prefer the *dolce far niente*, are becoming exorbitant in nearly the whole of Belgium. They want to find a place for the Liberals in a Communist regime, to lead them on further than they would go if their eyes were open.<sup>1</sup>

Truth and falsehood are confused in this passage. King Leopold detested anarchy and shrinking from work, to which exaggerated Socialist ideas disposed people. But he knew when and where to give a loose rein, ready at all times to pull up when the horse threatened to bolt. Woyna, a docile pupil of Metternich, did not clearly see this ; though he was not nearly so narrow-minded as his predecessor, Dietrichstein, and he often judged the situation in Belgium very aptly.

The aristocracy, which would not recognise the equality with themselves of the wealthy industrials, fought for their privileged position, and their hostility to the Constitution led a large number of the members of noble families to cling to the old Orangeist memories, avoid the capital, and live ostentatiously on their estates. Count Woyna criticised this, and also the selfish attitude of the clergy, the oppression of the peasants by the nobles, and the "complete idleness" of the sons of the leading families, who needed neither

<sup>1</sup> Count Woyna to Metternich, May 15, 1847 (State Archives).

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to learn nor to work. But the King Woyna did not understand. "He has," he said, "such a well-organised Army that he could, with the aid of it, keep everything in perfect order. It is a pity that King Leopold does not give the same active interest to purely Belgian matters as he devotes to large European questions, the solution of which is frequently promoted by his able counsels."

King Leopold was never moved from his path once he was convinced it was right. When a moderate Liberal Ministry had been tried, but had come to grief on its advanced Radical sections, he consented to the formation of the purely Liberal Ministry of M. Rogier, which came forward with a "new policy." The Belgian King realised that certain concessions must be made to the new age and the social and cultural advance of his people, if the country was to go forward in peace. Perpetually turning round one pivot would do no good. The natural development of the nation must not be hindered. If the wheels threatened to take them over a precipice, he would put a spoke in at the right time.

Through his friend the Archduke John he had, at the beginning of 1847, advised Austria also, in view of the general tendency of the times, and especially of the Whig policy in England, to come to terms with the spirit of the age. He said :

It is the more important for Austria to control its internal development prudently and make more progress than it does without giving way entirely to the *soi-disant* spirit of the age.<sup>1</sup>

But the Archduke had nothing to say, and Prince Metternich was entirely opposed to these ideas.

When disorder broke out in Switzerland—when Protestant and Catholic cantons fell foul of each other, and the question of the expulsion of the Jesuits and the Civil War

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Archduke, February 6, 1847 (State Archives).

## URGES REPRESSIVE MEASURES

of the Sonderbund rent the country—King Leopold began again to feel some concern about his Liberal Ministry and the threat of a European conflagration which he foresaw. There was great excitement in Italy and Spain; in Switzerland the Radicals secured one success after another; and there were grave premonitions of storm in the Germanic countries. The whole situation gave the King great anxiety. In a conversation with Count Woyna on December 6, 1847, he clearly expressed this; though his words were, naturally, accommodated to the personality of the Ambassador. This time, however, he spoke to others besides Austria. Distrustful of Palmerston, with whom he had never been reconciled since the abandonment of Belgium over the Dutch frontier question in 1839, indignant with France, traces of the revolutionary spirit of which were to be seen in Italy, Switzerland, and even South Germany, he saw great dangers menacing the whole of Europe. He said to Woyna:

It is the spirit of the Jacobins of the early years of the French Revolution that has got into the heads of the Progressives and Communists of France, Italy, Germany, and other countries. It is acclimatised in every country in Europe, and, taking possession of the masses, whom it denationalises, it threatens all Thrones and all Governments.<sup>1</sup>

With his presentiment of what was coming, deeply concerned by the maturing of things everywhere, he spoke of "the need to return to Conservative methods of Government." He thought the time had come for tightening the reins in foreign countries. He may also have wondered whether the Liberal Government in his own land would not lead the people on to the slope. He kept his eyes open, remained in his place, and concluded that in his own kingdom the time had not come to interfere and to carry out the measures which seemed to be required in the rest of Europe. Abroad there was only too good

<sup>1</sup> Count Woyna to Metternich, December 6, 1847 (State Archives).



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ground for concern. The February Revolution of 1848 at Paris compelled the *bourgeois* King to abandon his Throne and seek refuge in England. Once more it was France that gave the signal for all the revolutionary outbreaks in Europe.

On February 26th Woyna announced the "terrible news" of the political crime in France, the flight of Louis Philippe and declaration of a Republic. King Leopold was not less agitated by the fall of his father-in-law. "The tragedy," he wrote to Metternich, "is as appalling as it was unsuspected." He at once began to seek some means of averting the danger which threatened him in turn. For this he looked to the four Powers that were not yet directly effected, and proposed a Conference in London for the purpose of obtaining some influence over the Constituent Assembly at Paris. "Everyone must feel," he said, "that this is the moment to take precautions to prevent the complete dissolution of the political order in Europe, which would lead to the most frightful anarchy." <sup>1</sup>

Metternich, the pronounced reactionary, the very embodiment of resistance to innovation, was bound to feel the successive blows of events more keenly than any other. But he was not the man to excogitate new methods. He was not prepared to stir a hair's breadth from his principles. "Austria, my dear sir," he wrote to King Leopold on March 4th, "will not yield its ground; it will know how to do its duty." He traced the origin of events to England's policy and attitude, to the English Cabinet and Palmerston's conduct of foreign affairs. France, the country which had for sixty years shaken the foundations of society, he had quite given up. Nemesis, he said, would do its duty there, and "there will be nothing left of what we see in France." But England must be held responsible. He went on:

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Metternich, February 28, 1848 (State Archives).

It is a great misfortune that no one in England knows anything about foreign parts, and people measure everything by English standards. It would not matter to the world if English statesmen did not interfere in the affairs of continental States. On account of this pretension of theirs to direct matters according to their preconceived ideas, Europe is to go to pieces. What good will that do England? None that I can see.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the terrible experiences of 1848 and 1849, things did not go so far that there was any question of Europe going to pieces. Metternich's words apply rather to our time. Disintegration is much nearer; it has, in fact, ruined part of the Continent. But the greater part of it will be saved from the menace once more, if amongst the Western Powers counsels prevail such as King Leopold gave in his day.

The attitude of Belgium in face of the sudden outbreak in the neighbouring country was a brilliant indication of King Leopold's policy. Thanks to the Liberal Government which had taken office in 1847, the year before the February Revolution—thanks to the fact that the King had refrained from any reactionary steps that would make him appear hostile to the aspirations of his people—the news from Paris was received throughout Belgium with remarkable tranquillity. The King had said in the Cabinet Council that he would be no obstacle to the welfare of his people, if they wanted a different form of Government. He was quite willing in that case to sacrifice himself. His Ministers heard his words with unfeigned agitation, and then broke into a storm of protest against the idea of abdication. He reaped the harvest of his moderation and prudence. As he proudly wrote to Metternich, he could not sufficiently praise his country and people, though the conflagration spread to them.

He had the full support of England. It would not suit England to see a Republic in Belgium at the same moment as the establishment of a Republic in France. England

<sup>1</sup> Metternich to King Leopold, March 4, 1848 (State Archives).

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would have less influence over a Republic, moreover, and a common form of Government in France and Belgium might soon lead to a political union which would, even if the name were not used, be precisely what England sought to avoid, and to prevent which the Kingdom of Belgium had been created. Thus the King succeeded in keeping his Throne almost untouched. Even the Tsar was impressed. He began to speak of resuming diplomatic relations with the monarch and country whose revolutionary origin had so long alienated him.

The King was proud and happy over the situation. In nearly every country in Europe except his were disorder and revolt. In Belgium all classes of the population were at one in insisting that it was to their interest for the King to retain his position, and that none could more effectively occupy it. At the September Festival, which commemorated the revolution that had severed Belgium from Holland, open expression was given to this sentiment. A finely decorated vehicle, often drawn by twenty-four horses, was laden with the best products, agricultural and industrial, of each province. As Woyna reported to Vienna, the tangible proofs of the prosperity of Belgium were displayed before all eyes. At night the city was illuminated, and a large structure, in Moorish style, and capable of holding 5,000 people, was erected in the market-place. It was magnificently decorated and lighted inside, and dancing and singing went on continuously.

While Belgium danced, barricades were being thrown up in Cologne, the people were rising in Baden, and Louis Napoleon was putting himself at the head of the National Assembly at Paris. A marvellous contrast.

The King followed with strained attention and rare insight, from what the Archduke John called his "quiet corner," the social movements of 1848 and 1849. What he said about them is now more true than ever, and it

shows a parallelism of events that is often extraordinary. He wrote to the Archduke :

We continue to live in agitated times. All the evil elements seem to have broken loose, and it will be very difficult to check the Socialistic programme which runs as follows : " A spoliative and compulsory division of the earnings and savings of others and their families." That is a return to fist-law. Every man is to take what he likes, and keep what he can. That is preached at Paris, at least by the preachers for purely selfish purposes, but their fanatical followers receive it in a more elegant form, decorated with high-sounding theories. All that the nations have won by their courage and fine feeling is lost. The dangers merely make men more egoistic as it is a question of saving one's property, if not one's life.

Political impossibilities beget anarchy, and it is bound to end in a Terror of the type of 1792-3 or in a military despotism. There is, of course, no longer a question of freedom, law, welfare, and happiness, but merely of what, unfortunately, we see from one end of Europe to the other. Passions run too high for us to hope that common sense and practical intelligence will get a hearing. We have to wait and see what is strongest. In France there has been in the last few weeks much concern about the growth of Communism. The mass of the people have no idea what the struggle is about, except that each is determined to become very rich.<sup>1</sup>

The letters show how deeply King Leopold understood the psychology of the crowd. But he also pointed out how it was possible to avoid such excesses by shrewd government and conduct, and that it was which particularly fitted him to judge the situation.

For him it was a particular triumph when, in March, 1848, Metternich, overthrown in Austria and lingering for a time in England, sought refuge in Brussels. He who so often had adopted the tone of a mentor to the King or directed his Ambassador to adopt it, who had severed diplomatic relations with Belgium because (in the Skrzynecki case) it had sheltered political refugees, who had for years regarded King Leopold with distrust, now came to the Brussels Court as a political refugee, banished and hated, seeking a home abroad. The situation must

<sup>1</sup> Letters to the Archduke John, March 5 and 18, 1849 (Meran Archives).



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have deeply touched the King ; but, as the documents left by Metternich prove, King Leopold, ever correct, adopted the right tone in face of the fallen Chancellor. He did not refuse the appeal for a refuge in Belgium, but warmly welcomed the broken Prince. He kept the feeling of triumph in his own breast. That he had such a feeling we cannot doubt, for his success was mainly due to his own wise attitude.

## *Chapter IX*

### *KING LEOPOLD AND THE GERMAN QUESTION*

**W**HILE IN nearly every other country of Europe revolutionary outbreaks of popular anger against the ancient and ossified forms of Government kept Princes and Ministers, men and industries, in a state of restless anxiety, King Leopold continued quietly in his own country to study the great questions of European policy ; a group of problems which now formed the chief sphere of his activity. And of all the great questions which were started by the confusion of 1848-9 one of the most important was that of the unification of Germany. King Leopold, sprung from a German ruling family, constantly informed by his friend Prince William and many others as to the conditions in Germany, kept in mind, in the solution of this problem, the reaction upon his own little kingdom, which had made so much progress amidst all the storms.

Although Austria had in 1815, in its own interest, promoted Particularism in Germany as well as in Italy, King Leopold was of opinion that Austria, which then had Germany entirely in its hands, was entirely favourable to its aspirations, while Prussia was regarded as "greedy," and was dreaded. He meant that Prussia had merely succeeded by its Tariff Union in "enticing the various nationalities and lulling the Governments to sleep."

Meantime, the best people in Germany had been educated

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in the idea of unity, as opposed to the actual separation into so many sovereign States, in the sense that the Germans ought to hold a very important position and be a powerful nation. Even if all the States in Germany, small and large, including Prussia and Austria, formed a Confederation, it would really make little difference, as its sole organ, the Assembly of Plenipotentiaries of the various Governments, could scarcely ever decide any important point ; for in such matters they would require a unanimity which could hardly ever be attained. The only result would be the creation of a political police ; naturally, under strong pressure from Metternich.

Now that, in consequence of the Revolution at Paris and the events at Vienna which had brought about the fall of Metternich, the German people rose in many places, stormily demanding a Constitution, and as disorder won the upper hand even in Berlin and led to the memorable struggles of March 18th, 19th and 20th (1848), Heinrich von Arnim got the idea, as King Leopold wrote, of diverting the German people from its democratic aspirations by pushing forward the question of unification and of "saving Prussia from self-destruction by the ideal of German unity." King Leopold thought that Prussia put forward the question of unity, partly as a desperate resource, partly with the idea that possibly this would lead to its own aggrandisement. <sup>1</sup>

The King had always had little sympathy with Prussia, and it had not been improved by Prussia's attitude at the time of the separation of Belgium from Holland or of the various frontier questions down to 1839. His dislike, however, was not so much directed to the Prussian King as to the Prussian people, and especially the Prussian Minister. The bitterness he had expressed at the time of the Vienna Congress had not disappeared ; nor had he, as representative of his own

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Prince Schwartzenberg, February 18, 1850 (State Archives).

kingdom, any interest in the creation of a single greater Germany, possibly excluding Austria and becoming equal to it in power. He felt that Belgium, in virtue of its geographical position, might become a sort of buffer between the two permanently hostile nations, France and Germany, and this might, in certain eventualities, have incalculable consequences for him and his country.

King Leopold had more or less lost the feeling that he was a German. His service in the Russian Army, his life in England, his Belgian realm, his French relationships, his decades of absence from Germany, had made him quite non-national; and this had the advantage of freeing him from the limitations and partialities which a feeling of nationality is bound to give, and enabling him to think and act entirely in the interest of his life purpose.

There was, further, the revolutionary element which found expression in the German provisional Parliament, which grew out of a private assembly, and in its proclamation of the sovereignty of the people. Naturally, the decision of this Parliament to summon a National Assembly for the purpose of drafting a Constitution for Germany also seemed to him revolutionary. It was not at all certain that the new form to be given to Germany would not be ultra-democratic. In that case little Belgium would be wedged between that Pandora box, now the French Republic, and a democratic Germany, and Leopold's kingdom would be exposed to new trials at every storm in the neighbouring States. France alone, with its constant unrest, gave him concern enough. The whole of his family policy, as son-in-law of Louis Philippe and relative of the heir to the French Throne, had fallen like a house of cards at the removal of the July Throne.

For these reasons the Belgian King favoured the maintenance of the old German Confederation of States, and he did not want to see Austria, in the non-German population of which he saw an excellent obstacle to Pan-



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German activity in the west, excluded from Germany. In this he found himself opposed to his old confidant Baron Stockmar, whose view was rather that the dualism of Prussia and Austria was, in the end, unnatural and impossible; that Austria had always exploited Germany for its non-German ends; and that Prussia was, from the nature of things, destined to be the central German power. In the plan of the reconstruction of Germany which he drew up in May 1848 he expresses the conviction that "the pressure of circumstances would eventually force the German provinces of Austria into Germany."

The influence of King Leopold on his niece and nephew in England had in 1848 been so successful that Prince Albert also supported a plan for the regulation of affairs in Germany which was not far removed from the King's wishes. Presently, however, the Prince Consort and the Queen showed how independent of the uncle's influence they became for a time, for in January, 1849, they both adhered almost entirely to Stockmar's plan, as to which Prince Albert plainly gives his opinion in a memoir he sent to the Archduke John.<sup>1</sup> In a second communication to the Archduke the Prince returned to the situation in Germany, and said that the chief fault was that the cardinal question, the relative position of Austria and Prussia to Germany, had not only been left undecided in 1848-9, but had been deliberately thrust into the background. It was clear, he thought, that any Constitution would be worthless until that question was solved.

Moreover, the general plan of diverting the social unrest into the aspiration for unity, and thus checking Radical and Anarchist movements in Germany as far as possible, meant that one movement was in the way of the other; and it would eventually attain neither unification nor the social reform of the whole of Germany. To this King Frederick William IV's "romantic" conception of

<sup>1</sup> From Windsor Castle, June 6, 1849 (Meran Archives).

the position of Austria in regard to Germany contributed not a little.

The Prussian King, who could not break away from the idea of the traditional Imperial sovereignty of the Hapsburgs, saw the hope of Germany in the restoration, in hereditary form, of the Roman Imperial dignity for the actual head of the Austrian House and a council of Princes of the ruling families with a responsible Imperial Ministry to assist it. He said this in what seems to have been a quite honest letter, without reserve, to the King of Hanover.<sup>1</sup> Prussia was, in the King's wish, to have the hereditary position of Imperial Commander-in-Chief. In this the King was opposed to his Ministers, who declared unanimously that they "wanted the German crown for Prussia [the King here adds seven notes of exclamation], and therefore Germany should do nothing, propose nothing and give its vote to none." He went on :

My reply, that I would not take the Crown, and that I would not consent to Austria (through my fault and owing to a foolish Prussian bravado and ambition that contradicts and forswears its own King) leaving Germany, and thus losing for Germany in the counsels of Europe a third of its territory and the whole power of Austria, made no impression whatever. I returned from the Council in real despair, and it seems to me that all is lost if other sovereigns of Germany do not undertake the part which Prussia refuses—the task of making it clear to the rulers that they must pass from the actual condition of a Confederation of States into that of a Confederated State with sovereign rights to decide on the most vital interests if they do not want to fall hopelessly under the knife of the will of the Frankfort Parliament : that is to say, if they do not want to go out of existence. I give up the great dream of being able to work for the greatness, the fame, and the future of Germany.

The discouragement of the King was only a momentary mood, but even this would not have been able to prevail over a man of strong will and character, a man whose

<sup>1</sup> Letter of May 5, 1848, in the State Archives. Although the King repeatedly insists in the letter on the strictest secrecy the letter was at once communicated to Austria.

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path and plans were traced in firm and clear outlines. King Frederick William IV, however, was too little egoistic, too self-critical, too much concerned always about his rival, Austria, which must either be fought or submitted to. There was no third alternative. If any were attempted, it would infallibly lead to failure, to a vague half-and-half policy.

It was much the same with Frederick William's attitude toward questions of Constitution and constitutional government. In his heart he was entirely opposed to constitutional government. Nothing shows this better than his last words, in his will, which were to be put before every German ruler immediately before he ascends the Throne, even before he takes the oath to observe the Constitution. These impressed very seriously on the Prince who was acceding to the Throne to set aside the Constitution before taking the oath. William II alone had the moral courage, not only to pass over the last words of Frederick William, as his two predecessors had done, but to have the document destroyed. During the revolutionary years a Constitution had been forced upon the King despite his wishes, and his vacillation between his inner conviction and the eternal compliance which was thrust upon him robbed him of the popularity and high position in the mind of his people which he needed to carry out so difficult a task as the unification of Germany.

It was, therefore, not surprising that the National Assembly, elected on a revolutionary basis and opening on May 18, 1848, diverged more and more from the King of Prussia, and that in the Paulskirche at Frankfort a proposal to elect the King, who had already declined the Imperial Crown offered him by the southern Courts on March 22nd, Imperial Administrator was rejected by a large part of the Assembly with disdain. Naturally, the choice of an Austrian Prince, the Archduke John, was bound to give offence in Prussia. He was elected on



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## *THE ARCHDUKE AT FRANKFORT*

account of his reputation. It was said everywhere that he had in Austria always opposed the prevailing reactionary methods of government and the antiquated and ossified views of his Imperial relatives, and had proved this by his marriage with a postmaster's daughter in the face of enormous opposition. He was known to all as a representative of a policy of friendliness to the people.

In his heart, however, the Archduke always remained a member of the Imperial House of Austria, and he was, therefore, an abomination to all adherents of the Small-Germany party, to which most of the Prussians, apart from the King, belonged. He did not even get on with the King, as his position necessarily enabled him, in virtue of the work on the Constitution, which was the chief task of the National Assembly, to exercise an influence on the domestic politics of Germany, and consequently of Prussia. This would, of course, be favourable to the Constitution, and therefore displeasing to the King.

Moreover, the King also shared the view that the Archduke's sympathies leaned more to the Left than they really did. Any man who critically and impartially studies the Archduke's life in his diaries will see that he was, like King Leopold, fundamentally Conservative. He would go with the times only in so far as he was compelled. This is clear from his relation to Metternich, and particularly from his feeling for the Emperor Francis; and it is, perhaps, not sufficiently known.

The election of the Archduke by the Assembly on June 29, 1848, without consulting the Governments, was a bold stroke that was bound to interest King Leopold very deeply. The friendship he had once contracted with an important member of the Vienna Court seemed now about to bear fruit. King Leopold at once sought to exploit this in his own interest and that of his country: objects which certainly did not put Prussia's interests above those of Austria. One result was that he has been badly treated

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by Prussian public opinion, and even by eminent Prussian historians. It was from patriotic sentiment that Heinrich von Treitschke described the King as "*Monsieur peu à peu*," "*King Schleicher [Sneak]*," "*Marquis tout doucement*," and other nicknames ransacked from the literature of Europe. Treitschke's malice went so far as to deny the King any sensitiveness to feelings of chivalry and historical reverence; which is certainly wrong.

The King's friend, the Archduke, now Administrator of the German Empire, had no lasting success in his new position. A great deal was expected of him, and much stress was laid on his occasional differences with the Vienna Court and the Austrian ruling classes. But he was too much of an Austrian Prince, a Hapsburg, and a patriot, to drop his nationality, in spite of the distrust of him at Vienna, forget his origin, and set to work impartially to carry out the idea of unification. The two things—the remaining of Austria in Germany and the unity of Germany—were incompatible. As the Archduke wanted both, he could never accomplish his task. The Prussian solution of the whole question, with the exclusion of Austria, he would not consider.

King Leopold was particularly well informed about events in Frankfort, not only by his correspondence with the Archduke, but also by his confidential friend, Baron von Stockmar, who was a Coburg delegate at the Bundestag from the beginning of May. In addition, the King's nephew Prince Karl of Leiningen, played a very important part at Frankfort. From August 9 to September 5, 1848, he was President of the German Imperial Ministry. From the available evidence it is not possible to show how far King Leopold helped to secure this position for him, through his friend the Archduke, but it is significant that we find one of his nephews once more in a prominent position where very important matters were to be decided.

The Archduke's difficulties were due to the dilemma in

his own mind, which prevented him from taking up his functions with a clearly outlined programme. He hesitated between two ideas that might help Germany. At one time he dreamed of a Central Power, with the Princes as hereditary viceroys, and the Imperial ruler elected from the Princes of the Empire—no matter who, as long as he was the most suitable. Austria was to keep all its parts as an inviolable whole, and was to enter into an alliance of offence and defence, and intimate economic relations, with Germany. It was to be the relation of "two brothers at one in sentiment." This was possible; and it is what really occurred just before the Great War. The second way, which the Archduke chose, was much less clear. It was the constitution of Austria as a Federative State with provincial elements, and a Central Parliament in Germany with responsible Ministers: "in which case it would be possible for the [Austrian] provinces hitherto reckoned as German to be represented without ceasing to be parts of Austria, and it would be possible for the Austrian Emperor to be elected Emperor of Germany."

Prussia had no very prominent part in the Archduke's plans. Like King Leopold, he disliked Prussia; but he also disliked its King. For the time, however, Prussia had the upper hand in German affairs, as Austria was occupied with troubles in Hungary, Bohemia and especially Italy, and could not therefore exert sufficient force to carry through its wishes in Germany. The disorder in Hungary (in September and October 1848) and the October rising and struggle for Vienna had increased the difficulties of Austria; but Vienna was recovered, and Ferdinand was compelled to abdicate in favour of Francis Joseph.

The triumph of reaction at Vienna was the precursor of a similar victory in Prussia. The Prussian National Assembly was dissolved, and the Consitution of December 5, 1848, promulgated, setting up two elected Cham-



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bers, the popular suffrage taking effect through electors. King Leopold did not approve of these measures, though he was friendly with the Prussian King. He spoke sharply to the Austrian Ambassador, but that was for the purpose of flattering Austria by comparison. He did, however, believe that, when one is restoring a powerful regiment, so ultra-democratic a Constitution as that was contradictory. Woyna, naturally, replied that the attitude of the Prussian King could only be compared to the conduct of a man who flings himself to the ground in order not to fall.

Prince Felix von Schwartzenberg, who opened the Reichstag as President on November 22, 1848, at once resumed the correspondence with King Leopold, which had been broken off since the fall of Metternich. The parts were now changed. Metternich had posed as the teacher, the man of experience. Schwartzenberg "hastened" to "ask the benevolent sympathy" of his Belgian Majesty, and requested that "in case of need he might apply directly to him."<sup>1</sup> He was at that time thinking of a solution of the German question to be carried out by a Congress at Brussels. The capital of little Belgium was, of course, no rival of the great cities where Congresses had been held, so it was clear that the choice was mainly due to the qualities of the King, and his personal position in the political world.

Of this Schwartzenberg was particularly conscious. He had warned his Ambassadors in Brussels of the importance of standing well with King Leopold on account of his Royal niece in England. The marriage was bearing fruit a thousandfold for the uncle. His whole position in regard to Austria had changed. The old master of politics, who had controlled a great Empire for more than thirty years, was a fugitive, and Prince Schwartzenberg

<sup>1</sup> Prince Schwartzenberg to Count Woyna, December 8, 1848 (State Archives).

seemed to regard Leopold himself as a venerable master to whom Austria should apply for counsel and support.

Meantime the conflict of opinions as to the future of Germany had continued at the Frankfort National Assembly. There was a constant clash of proposals and counter-proposals of the Little-German adherents of Prussia and Greater-Germany apostles who wanted Austria to take the lead, of the privileges of the Right and the revolutionary claims of the Left. The reactionary events in Prussia led the Assembly to protest, but it had no effect beyond, perhaps, the modification of certain clauses of the new Consitution. But this interference in Prussian affairs brought further Prussian hostility to what the Conservative Press of Berlin called this "college of academic professors with pink carnations in their button-holes."

In face of all this confusion, King Leopold decided that there was nothing but to ask the various German rulers what they desired, and to "keep as far as possible to the old Imperial form." To the Archduke John he wrote :

Germany should be divided into spheres, a voice should be given to each of these, and a Directorate or Imperial Administrator should be elected by them for three or five years. In this way the Central Power would be a personification of the Federative State, and a Central Assembly, of two Houses where possible, would be the bond of unity which Germany has lacked for several centuries : indeed, has never really had in this form, with popular representation. Please discuss this with [Baron von] Gagern. It seems to me that this plan would also suit Prussia better than any other. Prussia has been half destroyed since March. It must necessarily try to reconstitute itself with its own memories. Then it can come in, certainly not as sovereign of the whole of Germany, but at the most in a Directorial capacity.<sup>1</sup>

From his correspondence with the Archduke King Leopold had inferred that the Austrian Prince clung to

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Archduke John, December 29, 1848 (State Archives).

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the interests of the Austrian supreme monarchy, and was gradually abandoning "earlier illusions." He said this to Count Woyna, but the Count did not believe it ; because he said "it is well known that the most friendly relations exist between King Leopold and the Archduke." In Austria itself there had always been a good deal of distrust of the Archduke on account of his past, his conduct at Metternich's abdication, and his supposed ambition, for which he has now said to have an opportunity at Austria's expense. When King Leopold told the Ambassador that one could have unqualified confidence in the Archduke, Woyna merely made very sceptical and "candid" remarks. He wrote to Schwartzenberg :

In view of the King's great ability—which is, I might say, almost entirely devoted to his own interests—his quiet judgment, and his intelligence, uncommonly sharpened by experience of affairs, it is quite natural for him to decide everything in the closest agreement with his own advantage. It is not in his character to take any interest in a person or action merely for his or its own sake. And, as a high degree of integrity is not easily reconciled with a coldly calculating, astute, self-centred spirit, we can only take the King's benevolent utterances at their full value when there is a plain interest of his own at the bottom of them.<sup>1</sup>

This critical estimate of the King's character is a step in advance on the colourless or too one-sided reports of the diplomatists of the earlier decades. There is much truth in it. For instance, in spite of the cordial expressions in the King's letters to the Archduke, the friendship—on both sides, be it said—had been begun and maintained for utilitarian reasons. It was a political intercourse, not a really disinterested sympathy of souls. But the regard for interest which Woyna blames is the duty of a leading statesman and ruler. What may be contemptible egoism in an ordinary man may be a great virtue in a statesman. His place is to put the interest of his country

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Woyna to Schwartzenberg, December 16, 1848 (State Archives).

first. If his own prosperity is bound up with that of the country, as is the case with a King as well as statesman, it would be superhuman not to feel pleasure in pushing that sort of egoism. Woyna had not quite got rid of the lessons of Metternich's school. He had not yet made up his mind to regard Leopold's kingdom as quite all right. "The King," he said, "knows well that the purists at Vienna regard his kingdom as a sort of contraband."

King Leopold thought that Prussia's internal condition was not yet sufficiently consolidated for it to accept the lead in Germany, if the National Assembly offered it; but the "revolutionary procedure" of the Assembly seemed to him a piece of arrogance. "Rights and property," he said, "cannot be treated in that way, and the history of the last thousand years regarded as *non avenu*." He continued to point out the necessity of an understanding of the Assembly with all the Princes, and of the executive direction which would result from this. The chief motives for this attitude were his monarchic self-consciousness, the memory of his own home, the Coburg Duchy, and the interest of Belgium.

There had meantime been a complete change at Frankfurt. The Ministry of Heinrich von Gagern, which had from December 16, 1848, replaced the Greater-Germany Imperial Ministry of the Archduke John under the lead of Schmerling, followed an entirely new policy. Austria was to remain out of the new German unity, and the link between the two was to be found mainly in a community of material interests. A German Imperial Constitution had been drafted, and the question of the election of an Emperor was opened; and, in the circumstances, the King of Prussia was bound to be chosen. This was done, in complete opposition to King Leopold's views, without much attempt at an understanding with the various German Governments. The Austrian representatives warmly opposed Gagern's plans. King Leopold learned



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Schwartzenberg's sentiments from a letter of January 2, 1849 :

Austria will not leave Germany. The Emperor has rights to defend there, and duties to fulfil, and he will not abandon them. There is only one contingency in which he would leave Germany, and that is if anarchy prevailed everywhere in it. As your Majesty so well says, Austria was once nearly ruined by German unity, and it will not run the risk a second time.<sup>1</sup>

Some time afterwards he wrote to the King :

People speak of an Austrian and a Prussian party. We are confident that we have given no occasion for this kind of talk. We are for the power, unity, and greatness of Germany. We make no effort to gain admission into the Confederated State, but what they are at present trying to set up at Frankfort is, not a Confederated State under a Central Power, but a united Germany with a centre that extinguishes all rights and each and every power of government, and to this they would give the decorative title of Emperor. It is extremely doubtful whether a Germany so constituted could resist the pressure of revolution from within. We think not.<sup>2</sup>

These candid expressions kept King Leopold in touch with Austria's plans, and he could adapt his attitude accordingly. But the Archduke John found that the new turn of events made his position very uncongenial. Nearly everything was done behind his back. He saw Prussian machinations behind every move. His feelings at the time are best shown in a letter of his to Prince Schwartzenberg at Vienna :

The Reichstag is a picture of fragments—Prussian, Austrian, and Republican parties, sensitiveness, hatred, and other passions have taken possession of people's souls, and are expressed in their speeches and in the Press. I regard the Reichstag as past use, and it has gone down considerably in public esteem. The Princes should not lose another day. It is the last throw—a question of their very existence. How far Prussia is sincere in its work you, dear Prince, can judge for yourself. I can scarcely be blamed if I do not trust it. I have had occasion here to know these gentlemen

<sup>1</sup> Letter to King Leopold, January 2, 1849 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Letter of July 2, 1849 (State Archives).

through and through, and I have found their King, who is in many ways a fine man, wavering, looking out for ideas, undecided. I close, dear Prince, with an entreaty that you will soon—very soon—put an end to it, and use all your resources with that object. My position is painful. I remain only for the sake of Austria and of peace. Once, however, the Provisional Government comes to an end, I have done here. I can stand it no longer. On the one hand, I will do nothing that involves injustice to the Princes; and this perhaps would be demanded. On the other hand, I was summoned here by the representatives of the nation in order to bring about a united and strong Germany, in their sense. This is not possible, and so, as I cannot do the one or carry out the other, I can stay here no longer.<sup>1</sup>

King Leopold was very much concerned about the development in Germany. He did not by any means wish to see Austria thrust out of Germany by Prussia, and it would be no less painful to see an eventual war between the two Powers for the leadership. He foresaw the terrible international consequences of a war at a time when most of the Governments of Europe had not their people so well under control as they would have in 1866: the evil effects on the social structure, the prosperity, even the Thrones of Europe. Very grave concern is expressed in a letter to the Archduke:

I see one party in Germany so inflamed as to say that a vigorous war with Austria is the sole means of building up a strong and *united* Germany.<sup>2</sup>

From that date he began to work for as close an understanding as possible between Prussia and Austria. His remarks on Prussia, in relation to Austria, became more moderate. As he said in the above letter:

As regards Prussia, I recommend the *suaviter in modo*. The Prussian King and Prince are really of an excellent disposition, but others are trying to force them in a direction that might prove very mischievous. A Directorate and a Central Assembly at

<sup>1</sup> Letter of the Archduke to Schwartzemberg, January 25, 1849 (Meran Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Letter of March 13, 1849 (Meran Archives).

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Frankfort still seem to be the only means at present to give practical effect to the idea of a united Germany. A wealthy educated Germany, happy in its *general* culture, wants a centralisation which seems to break the power of its members. In the various residences the citizens of the State will then be able to discuss the best kinds of fodder to plant in what used to be their streets.

In this King Leopold shows that, in his opinion—a quite natural opinion in the son of a small German princely House—the numerous small residences and Courts of the German Princes represented so many little centres of culture, promoting in every way the prosperity of commerce, industry, and art, and therefore of great service to the community.

The National Assembly, which gradually drew nearer to Gagern's view, that Germany's centre of gravity could not be placed, eccentrically, in Austria, but must remain in its natural geographical and economic position, in Prussia, nevertheless decided for a very Liberal Imperial Constitution and a very wide democratic suffrage. It was only thus, and by making the Imperial Crown dependent upon the acceptance of the Constitution, that they would succeed in uniting the supporters of heredity with the Left of the National Assembly in Gagern's idea of an hereditary Imperial power for Prussia. Austria's monarchical claims only promoted the unity of its opponents in the National Assembly, and on March 28, 1849, King Frederick William IV of Prussia was elected German Emperor.

But Frederick William's views on constitutional government were irreconcilable with the democratic clauses of the Constitution. He pointed out, also, that the various German Governments had something to say, and on April 28th the proposals for a Central Power were definitely abandoned. The Archduke John was much embittered by the course of events. He had not come to Frankfort to see Prussia get the Imperial Crown and Austria thrust out of Germany. At the most, he would have agreed to making the Central

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Power in Germany more or less independent of both Prussia and Austria. But a purely Prussian solution, ignoring Austria, hurt his pride as a Hapsburg and a member of the Austrian hereditary House. He now wanted to resign and depart, knowing well that the Prussian King's refusal of the Crown was mainly due to his dislike of the very democratic Constitution.

Possibly Frederick William had thought of leaving the Imperial dignity nominally to the Hapsburgs, but in reality, as Imperial Commander-in-Chief and head of Germany's military forces, keeping the key of German unity in his own hand. He would thus create a state of things, often seen in history, in which the Emperor would have the semblance of power and the second Imperial Prince (in this case the King of Prussia) would have the reality. While, however, one could build on these ideas when Austria was occupied in crushing disorder all over its dominions, this was no longer possible now that Austria's situation had so greatly improved. Italy was pacified, and Russian aid was available in Hungary.

King Leopold, reflecting on the world events with a broadmindedness which was rare at that time, had little sympathy with Prussia; but a war between the two great Conservative Powers, during which Russia would scarcely remain quiet, was much too dangerous a thing to contemplate. If fresh revolutionary disturbances were to break out in Europe, possibly his own throne would be endangered. He decided to act on these considerations. He wrote Schwartzenberg that he was fully convinced that the Prussian King and his Ministers were acting honestly in regard to the Imperial Crown and the Constitution. Nothing would contribute more to the restoration of peace in Europe than a good understanding between the three great Eastern Powers, but the various German Governments must really take up seriously the question of German unity. If they did not, the Radicals would,



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and they would do all they could to disturb and terrorise the smaller Kings, as had happened in Württemberg.

At Prussia's refusal to accept the Crown there had been disturbances in many of the German States, as the people wanted to see the Imperial Constitution carried. The chief disorders were in Saxony, and they were crushed by Prussian troops. The National Assembly declared this action of Prussia a breach of the peace of the Empire, and they broke off relations. The Assembly then became an arena of struggle between revolution and reaction. The Archduke summoned some of the moderates to the Ministry, but this alienated the Radicals, who ignored Gagner's attempts at mediation. The consequence was that members of the Assembly began to leave it in increasing numbers. Immediately after the resolution of May 10th, censuring the action of Prussia in Saxony, the Prussian Government had notified Frankfort that, in its opinion, it was imperative for the Archduke to dissolve the Assembly, return his mandate to the Governments, and in writing beg the King of Prussia to take up, provisionally, the position of Central Power. He was prepared to do so if the various Governments agreed.<sup>1</sup> With his own hand the Archduke angrily wrote on the margin of the message given him : " Traitor." As his own words have shown, he did not cling to his thorny post, but he was not going to be driven out by Prussia in this unceremonious manner.

Meantime the Prussian King had written him a private letter. He said :

Germany must be saved. Every day of delay in doing so makes it more insecure, and encourages France to act in its old part as hereditary enemy of the country. It must be dealt with. Hence I urgently entreat your Imperial Highness to *resign your Imperial office* (from which you want relief) *into my hands*.

<sup>1</sup> Telegram of the Premier, Count von Brandenburg, to Acting Legation-Councillor Herr von Karupetz, Berlin, May 15, 1849, 9.30 p.m. Copy, with marginal notes of the Archduke, in the Meran Archives.

The close of the letter looked like biting irony :

I now embrace your Imperial Highness with both arms, in the confident expectation that you will understand, as the heart of a German Prince can, the spirit in which I make this request. Do not on any account let this disturb our friendship, which is an infinite joy to me. Remember me kindly to your good lady, and believe, which is sacred truth, that you have no truer friend and admirer than your Imperial Highness's most devoted cousin and brother, Frederick William.<sup>1</sup>

How could any man use such words after what had happened ? Schwartzemberg laid the whole blame for it on Prussia, which " wanted to exploit the existing confusion to establish a permanent Prussian hegemony in Germany," and forgot that Germany was " almost powerless " in face of revolutions of all sorts, and must *exist* before it could be organised. He now saw in the once-despised Archduke the last hold that Austria had in Frankfort. Its situation had been rendered so frightful by all the storms that had broken upon it that, now the Prussian King himself had entered upon the scene, to push aside the Imperial Administrator, the Austrian Archduke, with his dissolving Parliament, he must stick to his post. Frederick William IV wanted precisely the contrary.

The Emperor Francis Joseph and Schwartzemberg begged the Archduke not on any account to resign now. In view of this the Archduke replied to the King that he would restore his mandate only to those from whom he had received it.

That is [he said] the whole of the Governments of Germany. You, dear sir, will acknowledge that I do right when I feel that I can restore what was entrusted to me only to those from whom it came : that is to say, not to one single Government, but to all. This will be done when the proper moment arrives : which may be any day. My health, as well as the circumstances in which I am placed, require that I should do so.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Charlottenburg, March 18, 1849 (Meran Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Letter of May 23, 1849 (Meran Archives).

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In his reply Frederick William indicated the chief features of the plans which guided the Prussian attempts at unity in the spring of 1849 :

I am seeking to promote a union of the whole of Germany with the whole of Austria. I do not want to link them in a so-called "eternal federation," but to see them *enter into a union which shall make them a single whole*. The provinces of Austria form, under their hereditary ruler, one compact State, to which the Olmütz Constitution gives a new form, and those German States which find it to their advantage would join in a Federative State, but always as an integral part of the great whole, over which the Emperor would preside. Whereas now !!! The Vienna Cabinet seems wholly to misunderstand this plan, and I have worked with Saxony and Hanover for the establishment of this Federative State, and our harmonious labour has achieved a result that may be regarded as a sound foundation of the structure.<sup>1</sup>

King Leopold, who, in view of the many disturbances in Germany, feared the further spread of anarchy in that country, allowed his earlier antipathy to the predominance of Prussia to become less and less. Someone must rule in Germany, and Austria seemed unable to do it. The Archduke's position had become lamentable. Better a sort of "presidency" of Prussia in Germany, as he cautiously expressed it, than anarchy, revolution, and a red republic. He was more and more anxious to see peace restored in Central Europe, and he laid increasing stress on the need to prevent war from arising out of the prevailing confusion. He now ventured to advise Schwartzemberg to moderate a little his policy of Austrian predominance in Germany, in order to maintain the unity of the three great Eastern Powers :

In war and in politics there is, in my experience, nothing more mischievous than the idea of insisting on everything, when one has already suffered great losses on many points. The consequence usually is that this leads to the loss of everything. However disagreeable it may be to assign Prussia a leading position in Germany, things have come to such a pass that it will not even be able to preserve its own provinces without the authority of some recognised

<sup>1</sup> Letter of May 28, 1849 (Meran Archives).

presidency. I know for certain that the Prussian Rhine provinces have sent influential representatives to Paris to learn whether a republic on the Rhine would be acceptable there. The same thing, more definitely, has been done by the existing republic on the Upper Rhine. Hence the agitation even in the French Army and the battle-cry : Down with all thrones that still stand. If the three Powers are united, I think victory is certain. If not, there may be grave catastrophes, for the Conservatives are so timid, and the opposite party doubly dangerous when it is led by men who have nothing to lose and everything to gain. I repeat, urgently, unity and common government of the three Powers ; otherwise a terrible evil may break upon all the Powers.<sup>1</sup>

These moderate counsels, given by the King in his own interest, reached the Austrian Premier at the moment when the domestic troubles of the Danube monarchy were subsiding. It is true that Hungary still stood against the Imperial troops, but at the end of May mighty Russia came to assist Austria, the Italian war was as good as over, and the Army could be transferred to Hungary. The results of all this were presently seen. The Hungarian rising came to an end, and the surrender of Venice completed the pacification of Italy.

Prussia came too late with its plans of unity. The favourable moment, when Austria was engaged elsewhere, had passed. There was a brief pause, and then the Danube monarchy, which had won a marvellous triumph over all the difficulties of the revolution, and was not a little proud thereof, began to apply itself, with increased self-consciousness and vigour, to the solution of the German question. In spite of the trouble in Hungary, Schwartzberg had taken no notice of the counsels of King Leopold, and had not retreated from his position in Germany. On July 7, 1849, he had written to the Archduke that the Central Power was now the only legal link that could secure the unity of Germany, and that the hour was not so far distant, many thought, when Prussia would have the humiliating experience of seeing its proud plans

<sup>1</sup> Letter of May 27, 1849 (State Archives).



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ruined, and of being compelled itself to seek help and support from the Central Power hitherto exercised by Austria and Bavaria.<sup>1</sup>

On July 31st Schwartzenberg again pressed the Archduke earnestly, in the highest interest of Austria, to remain in power. King Leopold was pleased to see Austria in such a better plight. He wished Schwartzenberg all success; he merely asked that Austria should not now display too dangerous an energy in face of Germany. The restoration of tranquillity in the Austrian provinces, the intimacy of the Austrian monarchy with the Tsar, who could no more tolerate revolution in Germany than in Russia, seemed to have placed all the cards in Austria's hands; and, if Prussia resisted, many dangers might arise. "The chief wish of the Anarchists," the King said, "is to see a struggle of Austria and Prussia." He therefore worked incessantly for the maintenance of peace between the three Powers, Austria, Prussia and Russia. He wrote to the Archduke:

I continue to work on the line of conciliation. You can do much, and you also are a preacher of peace. We must make it easier for the Prussians. They are in a difficult position with their dour and intelligent, but poor and ambitious, public. Argument alone will not go very far with such people.

Schwartzenberg himself, however, had little taste for bellicose solutions. The monarchy had had war enough, and now its favourable diplomatic situation, owing to the excellent relations with Russia, must be exploited, for the purpose of forcing Prussia, bloodlessly, if possible, from its dominating position in German affairs. The National Assembly had shrunk still further. Only a revolutionary fraction of it remained, like a sort of Rump Parliament. In June it transferred its sittings to Stuttgart, to be nearer to the disorders. The Archduke had remained at Frankfurt, on the plea that some of the Governments had not yet consented to his retirement. Although his position had

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Archduke, July 7, 1849 (Meran Archives).

become quite untenable, he persevered, at the Emperor's wish, even after Austria had, on September 30th, agreed with Prussia to set up some sort of interim Government.

Some time before this change in the situation King Leopold had desired to have a talk with the Archduke, as quietly as possible, on the extremely important affairs of Europe. They met at Liège in the beginning of October 1849. The King was told by the Archduke of Austria's new attitude in German matters, and he realised how much more confident Schwartzemberg had recently become.

He had, in fact, gathered this from his correspondence with Schwartzemberg. Once, when the Prince had to reply to the King, he let his secretary draft the letter. The man began with the words: "The monarchy has emerged stronger than ever from its storms and struggles, and the future of the Empire seems to be assured." Schwartzemberg struck out the typically Austrian "seems to be," and made it run "is assured more firmly than ever." The confidence which is disclosed by this little detail runs through the whole letter. To the King's admonition to seek a *rapprochement* with Prussia, the Prince replied:

We cannot be driven from our ancient and honourable and unselfish position in Germany. Is not the fault with those who urge Prussia along a dangerous path, dangling before it the deceptive dream of doing everything themselves, and leaving to others only the choice between subjection and exclusion? Fortunately, at the eleventh hour the good and sound German sense of the King has found a way out. May he persevere in it, and realise that Prussia's influence in Germany, within due limits, is contested by none. We, in fact, in many respects, and for the general good, wish to see it maintained. But the idea of absorbing Germany in Prussia, or Prussia in Germany, is a piece of nonsense which, if it were seriously carried out, would mean neither more nor less than the destruction of both.<sup>1</sup>

In opposition to this King Leopold reverted to the old German federative Constitution. He rightly supposed

<sup>1</sup> Letter to King Leopold, November 11, 1849 (State Archives).

that, after all that had happened, it would not be possible to escape having a central representation in the Federation, which might be ascribed to the Federated Parliament as an enlargement of its authority ; and this would also make it a National Federation in the eyes of foreigners. " This alone," he said, " would put an end to a certain coquetting with exaggerated institutions. There should then be some sort of customs union linking Austria with Germany." <sup>1</sup>

The Archduke's position was now quite impossible. He counted the days to the time when he could resign his post, and merely waited, as a matter of form, until all the German Governments had signified their consent. This was requested of Austria, so that it should not look as if Prussia alone were responsible for his retirement. The Archduke had come to grief on the contradiction between his character and origin and the task imposed on him. His labour in Frankfort had been a torture to him. He said himself that he was determined to drain the cup to the last drop ; that he would never forget that period, so bitter were the feelings it left in him.<sup>2</sup> Yet he could be proud of one thing, and it was partly due to the counsels of King Leopold ; both of them desired peace, and did everything in their power to avert any occasion of a European war, and consequently of a " struggle between those who would maintain and those who would destroy, between life and death." He wrote, again, to Duke Joseph of Saxe-Altenburg : " I cannot suggest the terrible consequences it would have for everybody—for people, Governments, Princes, and even for the faith." It is characteristic that in this enumeration the Archduke puts the people first.

But, however much the Archduke longed to leave his post, it was very difficult. Austria, on the one hand, for reasons of prestige, did not want to withdraw its Prince

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Schwartzenberg, November 23, 1849 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Letter to King Leopold, December 3, 1849 (Meran Archives).

except by a formal surrender of his mandate to the whole of the Governments : on the other hand, some of the small States, such as Oldenberg, Waldeck, Lippa and Gotha-Altenburg, would not consent, out of opposition to Austria. The Archduke turned to King Leopold, as his advice, he said, was so valuable, to help him to bring the matter to an end. He could not, and would not, hand over his powers to the commissaries of the provisional regime until it was formally recognised by every State.

King Leopold, who saw clearly that Prussia would no longer, from the nature of things, play a predominant part in Germany, even if Austria were excluded, and had not wished it to play that part, now worked to prevent an open quarrel between the two ; because, he said, " a struggle between the two Powers would be a thing of derision to the democracy [in the circumstances of the time]." What the democracy wanted might be read in Proudhon's *Confessions d'un révolutionnaire*, which he advised the Archduke to read, as it showed at what the revolution was aiming ; " though," he added, " he does not, of course, as usual, say that eventually this would become a practical possibility." <sup>1</sup>

King Leopold's concern about the possibility of a conflict between Austria and Prussia, and even of a divergence of the three great Conservative Powers, was not unfounded. There were actually rumours, as the Prince Consort wrote to King Leopold, that Prussia was aiming at an alliance with England and France, with some idea of territorial concessions or exchanges between Prussia and France, while England was to be conciliated by a plan of establishing a Thuringian kingdom for Prince Alfred, the six-year-old son of the Prince Consort and Queen Victoria. The whole thing was, on the part of Prussia, which was threatened by Austria and Russia, a *ballon d'essai*, to test how the Western Powers would take the idea of an alliance

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Archduke, December 12, 1849 (Meran Archives)



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with Prussia against Austria and Russia. The Prince Consort thought nothing of it. In a letter to King Leopold he said :

The idea of such an alliance, and of a Thuringian State for a child of six, is in itself too absurd to be entertained. How can anyone suppose that England would ever agree to a concession of the left bank of the Rhine to France ? As to an alliance in the explicit form of a treaty, it is well known that, except in special cases, England does not like to tie its hands as regards remote eventualities which are vague. It is true that people at the Elysée have talked about such things, but they never reached London, as it was probably well known that they would not be listened to there.<sup>1</sup>

This news was given designedly to the Austrian Ambassador by King Leopold, so as to warn Austria not to be too overbearing toward Prussia now that it had surmounted all its domestic difficulties. It did not matter much, he said, whether Austria and Prussia liked each other or no ; they must see that they had a common interest in doing each other no injury. The two States must work together at the restoration of Germany, or else it would never be restored. This implied, however, that Austria must satisfy Prussia, and not be too hostile to it. First local requirements must be met, and then some sort of central delegation might be created as a cupola over the structure. But it was not advisable to begin with the roof, when the substructure was not yet firm.

The march of events had shown that the way pointed out by King Leopold, the joint regulation of German affairs by the two Powers, was impossible. There could be no unification, therefore. There can only be one master in a house, if it is to prosper ; but that was not the drift of King Leopold's counsels. He did not want to see one great, united, powerful Germany. This was contrary to his plans. It might put Belgium in the danger of finding

<sup>1</sup> Report of Baron von Neumann to Prince Schwartzemberg, February 18, 1850. The King had shown him certain passages of a letter he had just received from the Prince Consort.

itself between the two mighty millstones, the great historical enemies, France and Germany. The warnings which the King sent to Austria at the close of 1849 and the beginning of 1850, not to be too sharp with Prussia, as this would lead to a dangerous feeling of enmity that might some day burst into flame, were a proof of political wisdom, a premonition of the events of 1866. Austria, as a matter of fact, took no notice of his warnings.

Schwartzenberg knew well how unfriendly the Tsar was to attempts at union, which he regarded as revolutionary, and therefore hated. The King watched the development with growing concern. The rapidly increasing self-consciousness of the Austrian Premier seemed to him very dangerous, though there was much in the vigorous and ambitious statesman that the King liked. He considered it a "great idea" when Schwartzenberg tried to connect Austria politically as well as economically with Germany by means of a commercial treaty, as Prussia had done some time previously. He said :

In 1815 Austria had much in its favour. The feeling in Germany was friendly to it, while Prussia was considered greedy, and was feared. It was by means of the customs union that Prussia succeeded in attracting the various nationalities and lulling to sleep the various Governments.<sup>1</sup>

Possibly Austria would succeed in the same way, but Prussia had already acquired too strong a position in Germany. Even if Austria succeeded in entering into some sort of durable agreement with Bavaria, Würtemberg, Saxony and Hanover—which would, in his opinion, be a good thing—it seemed to him still inadvisable to leave Prussia "unsatisfied." He continued :

Even in case of war, to prevent Prussia from profiting by its actual position it would either have to be *totally destroyed*, or one would have to reckon with *the same intrigues and antagonism*, and all their consequences, from a humiliated Prussia. The more so, as

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Schwartzenberg, February 18, 1850 (State Archives).

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this would make it the idol of the revolutionary parties of every country. On the other hand, if you come to an understanding with Prussia, the intrigues will be given up as aimless, and the antagonism may be converted into a common action against revolution ; and thus the most dangerous of all our enemies, social anarchy, can be fought in co-operation. That is at the moment the impression of all parties in France. All the more prominent men, such as Thiers, Berryer, Dupin, etc., say : “ Qu'on mette les idées de politique à part, et qu'on s'allie contre l'anarchie sociale tant qu'on aura encore des moyens de lutter.”

Thus King Leopold had come back to the sort of intimidation which he had so often found effective in Austria, especially in the time of Metternich ; and reaction had recently made very great progress there. On the other hand, the Belgian King by no means wanted Austria to leave Germany, because there had to be someone there to check Prussia, in case it should give signs of too independent and vigorous a policy. It could easily happen that Prussia would realise its ambitious projects, and become a military Power of the first rank, “ exerting great pressure on its weaker neighbours.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, for Austria to separate itself from Germany *would be a form of suicide, as its nine million Germans would not long be able to withstand the intrigues of the other nationalities.*

These prophetic words of King Leopold show that he had reflected very deeply on the problem of Austria. The new links provided by Bismarck after the conflict of 1866 helped to keep the polyglot monarchy together ; but when Austria ceased, through its share in the defeat of the Great War, to have the aid of Germany, the Germans of Austria could no longer hold the State against the other nationalities. The great Empire fell to pieces, and the misery of division into small States now broods over its ruins.

Schwartzenberg was much more self-willed and independent than King Leopold had imagined. The Minister wanted to use the King as a link with the West and as a

<sup>1</sup> Report of von Neumann to Prince Schwartzenberg of a conversation with King Leopold, February 18, 1850.

source of all sorts of necessary information. The King had only to be stimulated, and he then reacted of himself; for he was sincerely attached to Austria, whose triumph at the Vienna Congress and proud position under Metternich he had seen, both from selfish reasons and out of respect for the greatness and power of the Empire. In this he found himself opposed to all who were otherwise nearest to him—his nephew Albert, his brother Ernest, the reigning Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, and even his confidant Stockmar. They were all “obsessed” with the idea of German unity, as the King once said.

It became clear that King Leopold was no longer so well informed as he used to be. From France he now had no news, since the carefully planned relations with the Orléans family had become worthless owing to its fall. In England the Prince Consort and Queen Victoria had become much more independent, and the King’s position on the German question was taken very badly in many quarters in Germany. Yet he had considered Schwartzberg’s attitude in regard to Germany too aggressive. He had entirely ceased to speak against Prussia, and he now worked for a *rapprochement* of Austria and that country.

Schwartzberg ventured to give the King advice about his domestic politics: in which he began to walk in the footsteps of Metternich. He said in a letter to the King that the chief aim should be, not to let the great difference between the Belgian form of government and that introduced in France appear too obviously. Much encouraged by the fall of the Liberal Palmerston, he wrote:

The King’s duty is, surely, gradually to restore to the principle of authority in Belgium the force which it once had. On every side to-day we have the alternative of this principle or the complete dissolution of society. Everything between the two rests merely on empty phrases and unpractical Utopias, and clinging to these leads sooner or later to the second alternative, the abyss.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter to King Leopold, January 18, 1851 (State Archives).



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The King had reason to see in England how a single Minister with such ideas could "put it in a position of isolation and drag it into an alliance with the scum of all the nations of the earth." On the German question Schwartzenberg was very far from disposed to give in. He wanted to create a new federal Constitution on the lines indicated as legal in the old Constitution : that is to say, by the harmonious co-operation of all its members. But this was rendered impossible by the separatist policy "recklessly" followed by Prussia. Hence he, Schwartzenberg, was forced to seek "more drastic means." In the unhappy conflict of Austria and Prussia he saw only a prospect of gain to the revolutionaries. But he would not give in to Prussia. It must give guarantees that it will "cease to press for the realisation of unattainable ideals of union." Until then he would concede nothing. It was a deadlock.<sup>1</sup>

Prussia summoned a Congress of Princes at Berlin, and Austria invited the Bundestag to meet at Frankfort. The Hessian rising added to the confusion. It hung by a single hair whether the war which King Leopold so much dreaded between Austria and Prussia, and the various small States which adhered to one or the other, should not break out. Schwartzenberg conceded nothing. The Tsar was opposed to Prussia. Had the diplomatic game of the Minister succeeded, Prussia would have found itself involved in a war with Russia, Austria, and South Germany, with its eternal enemy, France, on its flank. The Austrian Minister worked out all the consequences. He would push his diplomatic victory to the end, and exploit the whole constellation of Powers. King Leopold's warnings were brushed aside by Schwartzenberg with the words : "Il faut avilir la Prusse et après la démolir." The whole of Germany was to feel the power of Austria.

Thus came about the greatest defeat which the states-

<sup>1</sup> Letter to King Leopold, June 26, 1850.

men of Prussia had ever experienced, the Olmütz Convention of November 29th (1850), when the Prussian King had to accept Schwartzemberg's humiliating terms, even partially to demobilise his army. It was a triumph for the Austrian statesman. But every triumph has in it the seeds of a triumphant revenge. Nations cannot be, either in a military or a diplomatic sense, so crushed that even the thought of revenge is killed in them. So it was bound to come to 1866, the year that was to decide which State should have the predominant position in Germany.

## *Chapter X*

### *INTERVENTION IN AUSTRIA AND ITALY*

WHILE MOST of the other monarchs of Europe were engrossed in their own concerns, their domestic policy giving rise to problems which absorbed all their attention, King Leopold, almost entirely protected from internal disorder by his Liberal Ministry, was able to devote all his energy to foreign politics. The German question had, naturally, occupied him most, because it affected countries contiguous to Belgium, and might lead to a displacement of the centre of gravity that might compel his country to change its policy.

But he did not omit to give his attention to those troubles which, when the February Revolution broke out in France, spread to the venerable Empire of Austria and shook it to its foundations. The rule of the Hapsburgs was threatened in Hungary and Italy, and Leopold followed events in both countries with great anxiety. The progress of the revolutionary movement inspired the King with some concern about the survival of the ancient monarchy, which, for very positive reasons, he would like to see intact. It fitted just as it was in the entire political system which the Belgian King thought best for Europe. Austria was to be the counterpoise to all-powerful Russia, the sanctuary of the monarchical idea, and the watchman who was to see that no State arose on the north-west frontier of Belgium that could

threaten the independence of the little country; as Holland had done from the north, and France had wished to do from the south. As early as 1845 the King had predicted that things would happen all over Europe which would quicken the too tardy pace of evolution:

There is, unmistakably, a general impulse toward something new, and the long peace has greatly promoted the education of the lower classes. The resources at the command of most Governments are, in my opinion, adequate to check this impulse, or direct it in a way which will serve the general good. But they are, I think, adequate only in time of peace, and I believe that any general war will lead to political revolutions. The Lord protect the good old Empire of Austria, and keep it prosperous and whole, as it is after so many storms, and displays such a fine spirit. Hungary could become a splendid country if the good people had common sense. A system of isolation will never do it for them.<sup>1</sup>

The efforts of the Hungarians to make their country a State independent of Austria, and only linked with it by a personal union, had then greatly moderated, and King Leopold's sound political intelligence had seen that the country would prosper, and hold together its various peoples, only within the frame of the Empire. He inserted in his letter the reference to Hungary, as he saw in its conduct a precedent for the nationalities of the Empire which might ultimately endanger its existence. He wanted to see the Austrian monarchy remain a real foundation of European policy.

When, in the further course of 1848, it came to war in Hungary, King Leopold felt that this was an opportunity "effectively to amalgamate" the country with Austria. He meant that this could be done without destroying existing forms. The name of the kingdom and all its ancient usages, formalities, and titles would, as far as possible, be preserved. He thought that so much could be done to conciliate the higher nobility, while there would be greater profit to the poorer nobles

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Archduke, April 2, 1845 (Meran Archives).



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from the improved conditions of the country, which would be a recompense for the loss of the feeling of nationality and independence. Even the peasants might be won by some corresponding advantage. This would, he thought, prepare the way for a "centralisation of the Austrian monarchy," which would be outwardly expressed in a central National Assembly, but not in a great centralisation of power, which the King considered neither necessary nor useful. He said :

Political wisdom will be consulted best by each particular nationality having its protector in the Government and seeing that it is not injured in its customs, even its aspirations, but is able to live happily. Even apparently heterogeneous elements can be very happy in this way, and blend into a great whole.

Hungarian affairs had thus only an indirect interest for the Belgian King, in so far as they could threaten the existence of Austria. The insurrection in Italy concerned him much more closely and directly, for England and France were interested in the question of the unification of Italy, and their interests were not identical ; a fact, which, as we have seen in many instances, always made King Leopold particularly sensitive.

Hence his interference in Italian matters was much more appreciable, and he drew up innumerable plans for the adjustment of differences and the establishment of a situation which should ensure peace, yet be in harmony with his own wishes. He brought to bear the whole of his far-reaching relationships ; and, although his influence in France had been much reduced by the fall of Louis Philippe, the Italian affair showed once more how considerable a part the Coburger played in the world's diplomacy, and how cleverly he exploited his relationships against any who sought to disturb his political circles.

In Italy the idea of unification had spread far and wide. It had been realised that Austria had succeeded in keeping in subjection for centuries the scattered small

States of Italy, and ruling large parts of it, by a deliberate application of the maxim, "Divide et impera." The liberally minded Pope, Pius IX, had ascended his Throne in 1846, and it looked as if the national idea would be promoted even by him.

The storm burst first of all in Naples and Sicily, the most oppressed provinces, and the Constitution which was extorted there was an education to the whole of Italy; for a similar concession had soon to be made by the Grand Duke Leopold II of Tuscany and King Charles Albert of Piedmont and Sardinia. Modena also was the theatre of a revolutionary movement; and in Lombardy and Venetia, which were under Austrian rule, the movement against "Austrian feudalism" assumed so menacing a character that the army of occupation felt itself a police force in a thoroughly revolutionary State. The state of war had to be proclaimed in both provinces, and this had been done before the news of the February Revolution at Paris raised passions to a fever heat.

When this happened, it was impossible to control the population. There was an insurrection at Milan. Radetzky was forced to evacuate the city, and Charles Albert declared war against Austria. The movement in Italy, which was inspired by Liberalism as well as Nationalism, was greatly encouraged by the Liberals of England, when, in 1846, Lord John Russell came to power, with Palmerston as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Immediately after the election of Pius IX, who was believed to be Liberal, the English Premier had sent his father-in-law, the Lord Privy Seal, to the new Pope, to encourage him in the way of reform. England had, for various reasons, embraced the idea of the unification of Italy. In the event of a new conflict with France—and the name of Napoleon began again to assume a marked prominence—a united Italy might, perhaps, be induced to fall upon the French in the rear. The French would, moreover,

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have a new rival in their ambition to obtain the paramount position in the Mediterranean. It is true that there was, on the other hand, the possibility of an eventual political alliance of the two States; but the English would see that this was never realised. For the rest, they would in the eyes of the whole world be the champions of the liberty of a people, of Liberal principles, of "the right of self-determination."

Palmerston, who was no friend of reactionary Austria, was an enthusiast for the unification of Italy, and Lord Minto's report on his journey to Italy confirmed his enthusiasm. France had not yet become sufficiently settled in its Government to permit Cavaignac, although he was to some extent a Dictator, to make a decisive intervention in so important a matter as the Italian question. Leading men in France would like to see a Republic established in Italy, though they did not want their unsettled country to play an active part in this. Hence Palmerston had to act himself if his far-reaching plans for Italy were to be successful.

The English Minister had for a long time been uncongenial to King Leopold, who regarded him as a man who would set the whole of Europe aflame with his ardent temperament. Above all, Palmerston was the statesman who had especially abandoned him during the trouble with Holland, and was at all times eager to check the Belgian King's influence on Queen Victoria. King Leopold found that the best way to oppose him was by direct action on the Queen. In this case he succeeded in inspiring her with an increasing distrust of the impulsive Minister and his love of innovation. She felt that she was ignored, and she began to refuse her consent to Palmerston's policy in many instances.

King Leopold had visited London in the late January of 1848, in order, as Count Woyna reported to Metternich, to exploit the *tendresse filiale* of the Queen and to

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counteract the "pernicious" manœuvres of the "so impulsively and arrogantly passionate ambition" of the British Foreign Minister. Meantime events had developed in Italy as we have described. Palmerston considered that the game was won when the victory of Marshal Radetzky, especially in the battle of Santa Lucia, damped his zeal and that of his Italian protégées. These successes of the Austrian Army helped to make the Queen and the Prince Consort more disposed to listen to King Leopold's charges against the Foreign Minister. He received severe letters from the Queen in connection with the Italian question. She was absolutely determined that England should not take an active part in Italy or leave to France a power of arbitration which would infallibly be used to further the establishment of a Republic in Italy.

Radetzky had meantime obtained new successes. The battle of Custoza had been won, and on August 6th Milan had been recovered. King Charles Albert was compelled to seek an armistice. Palmerston, who saw all his plans ruined, wanted to take action and to induce France to join him in opposition to Austria. King Leopold therefore proposed to the Archduke John that Austria should come to an understanding with Charles Albert for the organisation of Lombardy as a separate State under an Austrian Prince. The pretext of a plebiscite could, he said, easily be found.<sup>1</sup>

But Austria had no mind to surrender Italy after these victories, even when King Leopold pointed out that it was England's wish to strengthen North Italy nationally against the French. The Imperial State wanted to keep all its provinces, and cared little what England wished in the matter. Queen Victoria, under the persistent influence of her husband and her uncle, became more and more impatient of Palmerston's lead, as that statesman

<sup>1</sup> Letter of August 18, 1848 (Meran Archives).



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“will have his kingdom of Upper Italy under Charles Albert, to which every other consideration is to be sacrificed.”<sup>1</sup> She even thought of dismissing him. In October (1848) she said that Lord Palmerston’s partisanship in the Italian question was beyond all bounds, and she feared that his policy might prejudice England’s character and honour, and jeopardise the peace of Europe.

In spite of her misgiving and reserve for a time, the Queen had been inspired with this antipathy to Palmerston by the constant, quiet, adroitly exercised influence of King Leopold. He had succeeded the more easily as Palmerston had been so imprudent—though whether he did it deliberately or no is not known—as to leave letters directed to the Queen open in the Foreign Office. The Queen would not tolerate such things. On that point she was very sensitive, and was firmly determined to protect her dignity to the utmost against any encroachments of statesmen who thought that, with a woman on the Throne, they could take liberties. But Palmerston remained in office. The Queen had no light task in dealing with him, and, constitutionally, she could do nothing.

So the struggle continued. In spite of all the Austrian victories Palmerston did not abandon his views, and the idea of English mediation was mooted. The confusion which had meantime fallen upon Austria, the October revolution at Vienna and Prague, had encouraged Palmerston. He already looked upon Austria as lost.<sup>2</sup> The speedy suppression of the revolution at Prague and Vienna did not induce him to give up his idea. There must be a Congress to consider it, and King Leopold, who continued to think of an independent Lombardy

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Queen Victoria to Lord John Russell, August 21, 1848 (*Letters*, II, 227).

<sup>2</sup> Count Woyna to Schwartzemberg, December 4, 1848 (State Archives).

under an Austrian Prince, with the frontier at about the Mincio, wanted to see the Congress held at Brussels, so that he might have a preponderant influence in it. The wishes of France also had to be considered. The French did not want Sardinian rule beyond the Ticino or at the Po, east of the line of Pavia.

After the taking of Vienna by Jellacic and Prince Windischgraetz, there came into power in Austria a man, Prince Felix Schwartzberg, whose ability, firmness, and energy at once gave the State a clear and strong lead. He decided immediately to make use of the influence of the Belgian King. In a long letter to the King he expounded his views of both the German and the Italian question.

He wrote with great bitterness about Palmerston, whose conduct "came very near to the line beyond which it would seem impossible to avoid an open rupture between England and Austria, which had been so friendly for centuries."<sup>1</sup> His machinations against the integrity of the Austrian monarchy were made even worse by the "crude and offensive form," and the "arrogant and injurious tone" of his communications. Schwartzberg went so far as to ask the Emperor's representative in London to inform him of unpleasant remarks of Palmerston's, forbid any other than strictly official communication with the English Foreign Minister, and have the change of Government at Vienna announced in Berlin and Petrograd, but not in London, by an Archduke. That troubled Palmerston little, but the Queen was concerned. Schwartzberg therefore made known through King Leopold the reason why he did not send an Archduke—namely, Palmerston—and it would not have been possible to find any man a more willing agent in such a matter than the Belgian King.

Meantime, on December 10, 1848, Louis Napoleon

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Count Woyna, December 8, 1848 (State Archives).

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Bonaparte had been elected President in France. In this King Leopold saw "a great manifestation against the Republic," and at once concluded that it would lead to a *question d'empire*. In Italy the memory of the kingdom created there by Napoleon I inspired a hope of a new emancipation with the aid of French troops. Gioberti was the first to suggest summoning the French to Italy. Napoleon's position, however, was still far too insecure for such a venture. He had first to secure his power at home and create a strong and thoroughly loyal army.

England, therefore, or Palmerston, seemed to be alone in pleading for a single monarchy for the whole of Italy. The entire question was one for a European Congress. King Leopold wished this to be held at Brussels, so that his capital might be the scene of a gathering of the great Powers in order to decide issues of grave moment to the whole of Europe. The world would thus realise how important a part the Belgian King played in spite of the smallness of his country. He urgently pressed Austria to go to Brussels; though that State, after all its victories in the field, and in spite of the persisting confusion in Austria and the revolution in Hungary, showed very little inclination to lay before a Western tribunal, by no means friendly to the Empire, a matter which it held to be beyond dispute. King Leopold had expressly written to Schwartzemberg that it was "almost imperative to have an understanding about the entire condition of the peninsula."

Schwartzemberg did not see this, as the conference would have raised questions which meant so many points of hostility to Austria. King Leopold had, therefore, little success in his attempts to convince the Prince that it was to the interest of Austria to hold the Congress. It was true that the King would have supported Austria at Brussels, but the compromise he advocated would be

carried out at its expense. Full of indignation against England's, especially Palmerston's, conduct on the Italian question, Schwartzenberg replied to the King :

The present state of Italy is mainly the work of English diplomacy and the fruit of the seed sown by Lord Minto. In March Lord Palmerston broke his staff over Austria—he gave us up, and struck us out of the list of Great Powers. A Kingdom of Italy was to be formed under his protection by insurrection at home and treachery abroad, in order to provide a counterpoise to France in the south. The plan was wrecked on the unalterable disunity of the Italians and the courage and perseverance of our army, yet Austria is now asked to sacrifice its recovered possessions for the realisation of this unfortunate enterprise. If, as it seems, this is to be the aim of the mediation and the conference at Brussels, the Imperial plenipotentiary would have no alternative but to explain our position and withdraw.<sup>1</sup>

In Schwartzenberg's opinion peace could be concluded between Austria and Sardinia only by direct negotiation of the two States, and order could be restored permanently in Italy only by a Congress of all who had had a part in the resolutions of 1814–15. In that case Schwartzenberg could count on the help of Russia, with which Austria was then closely associated. The Tsar, in particular, was entirely on the side of Austria when it was a question of suppressing revolutions. He had painful memories of revolution in Poland.

It seemed, therefore, that there was little prospect of King Leopold succeeding with his plan of making Brussels the centre of European decisions. He felt the strong reluctance in Schwartzenberg's words, and concluded that the successes in Italy and in dealing with the Vienna revolution and the understanding with Russia had rather exalted the Prince. In his reply, therefore, he wisely advised him that in foreign affairs Austria would do well to cultivate the *suaviter in modo*.

In February 1840, Austria's attitude became quite

<sup>1</sup> Letter to King Leopold, January 2, 1849 (State Archives).



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clear. It was now entirely a question of re-establishing the earlier situation, and a diplomatist, Count Colloredo, was dispatched to London to explain that the idea of mediation was futile. This caused great anger in Sardinia, and even in England, especially in the case of Palmerston. Even France, under its new President, seemed disposed to adopt a new policy in the Italian question, and King Leopold feared that the war would be resumed, with incalculable consequences. He feared that the whole of Europe might be drawn into it. At all events, he affected to believe this, in dealing with the diplomatists of Austria, in order to make them shrink from adventures. He pointed out, moreover, that Lord Palmerston had, owing to the English Court and the ideas of Lord John Russell, the Premier, changed his mind, and abandoned the plan of a North-Italian Kingdom. He therefore, in his characteristic manner, urged Austria to be "extremely careful."

But the favourableness of the general situation had made the Austrian diplomatists very confident. Count Woyna, a much abler diplomatist than his predecessor, Count Dietrichstein, began to inquire very cautiously into the reasons for King Leopold's constant counsels of prudence. He reported to Schwartzenberg :

That King Leopold should recommend great caution is quite natural, as he is on every occasion for peace at any price. He is convinced that, if hostilities are renewed, even if only on the Piedmontese frontier, the existence of Belgium would be threatened, and in the outbreak of a war in which France might possibly be involved he sees the certain fall, if not destruction, of his Belgian Kingdom. Hence in all questions of this nature the King's judgment, which is stubborn enough at all times, is entirely prejudiced, and therefore unreliable.<sup>1</sup>

Schwartzenberg had not the least idea of yielding from fear of any further complications with Sardinia, which, in his opinion, continued to preach war and conquest

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Schwartzenberg, February 19, 1849 (State Archives).

in Italy, and to attempt to cause disorder in other parts of the monarchy, and put forward quite impossible demands. King Charles Albert could not withdraw. The Radical national party in his country had obtained power, and republican propaganda spread from Rome. Hatred of Austria was in his very blood. In this mood he wrote to King Leopold a very bellicose letter, the gist of which is in the words : " Le sort est jeté, vaincre ou mourir les armes à la main."

In his reply, King Leopold pointed out to him the danger of attacking the Austrians without allies, without being able to count upon the effective assistance of either England or France. Queen Victoria also advised the Sardinian King not to risk his Crown. " Charles Albert," she wrote to her uncle, " is really mad, and it is to be feared that he will soon begin hostilities." But it was all of no avail. King Leopold made one more attempt, in a pressing appeal to his friend, the Archduke John, to bring Austria to a conference table at Brussels. He wrote :

The position of Austria is so fine, so triumphant, that it can only suffer by an outbreak of hostilities in Italy as an apparent consequence of a tortuous policy on the part of Austria, as all the mischiefs that would result from it would be attributed to Austria. It would, apparently not without reason, provoke great hostility on the part of the actual British Cabinet. The folly of the Italians may possibly reopen the war. If that happens, Austria will be in a much better position if it has done everything that is reasonable. Even the French Government will then be in a position that will enable it to hold aloof from hostilities in Italy and undertake the part of mediator. On the other hand, if the war *seems* to be begun by Austria, I do not see how it will be possible for the French to avoid intervening, ostensibly to protect their frontiers in Piedmont. To bring the French upon oneself instead of the Sardinians would be an incredible blunder.<sup>1</sup>

This was almost exactly what happened in 1859 ; but in 1849 Napoleon's position was not strong enough, and

<sup>1</sup> Letter of March 13, 1849 (Meran Archives).

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England had no wish to be involved in a land war so far from its coast. Sardinia was, therefore, alone when in March 1849, the war with Austria reopened. The aged Field-Marshal Radetzky set to work once more. In a four days' campaign, from the 20th to the 24th of March, he fought the victorious battles of Mortara and Novara, and shattered the hopes of the Sardinian King. Charles Albert abdicated in favour of his son, Victor Emmanuel.

Schwartzemberg now saw his policy of the unconditional maintenance of the Italian provinces by Austria supported by a brilliant victory in the field. Victory on the field of battle—force—is in the last analysis always the basis of political order and of the maintenance of States. Thus it always was, and is to-day. All the power of civilisation, of ideas, of philosophies and brotherhoods, has made no change in this respect.

In a very self-satisfied frame of mind, Schwartzemberg wrote to King Leopold that he was now informed of events in Turin, and he was therefore unwilling to take part in any mediation conference until the Powers were entirely conversant with the actual condition. "If," he said, "our plenipotentiary were to appear in Brussels, we should certainly differ from France and England, and war with Sardinia would not be avoided; for Lord Palmerston would be able to secure advantages for his client at our expense, and to influence France in that sense."<sup>1</sup>

This time both Palmerston, with his Radical aspirations, and King Leopold, with his proposals of compromise, and the whole plan of a Brussels Conference were thwarted. The sword had cut through all the intrigues of diplomacy and provided new and firm foundations for Schwartzemberg's policy. King Leopold bowed to the force of facts,

<sup>1</sup> Letter to King Leopold, March 26, 1849 (copy in the State Archives).

sent his good wishes to Schwartzberg, said nothing further about a Brussels Conference, and sought to secure peace as quickly as possible between Sardinia and Austria, in order to prevent fresh complications.

Peace was concluded, at Milan, on August 6, 1849. England was able to secure the defeated King of Sardinia against territorial concessions, but not against an indemnity to Austria. When King Leopold saw that the conflagration he dreaded had not broken out, he quickly reconciled himself with the new situation. All that he regretted was that he had lost the opportunity of displaying to the world, at Brussels, the extent of his influence. His position in Europe had been little affected by what had happened, and his country was guarded from every danger.

Europe looked upon the solution rather as a personal defeat for Palmerston. All, however, were united in praising the bravery of the Austrian Army, which, threatened from within and without, had done its work so rapidly under the wonderful lead of its aged Marshal. King Leopold joined in the praise. He remarked, in speaking of the earlier Constitution of Austria, that in England it was a principle that the Army belonged exclusively to the Crown, and Parliament had merely the important function of voting supplies. He wrote to Schwartzberg :

In 1837, when my niece ascended the Throne in England, there was an attempt to change this, and I was fortunate enough, through Lord Melbourne, who, being a man of honour, felt his responsibility as regards the inexperienced young Queen, and permitted me to act with Wellington, to save the old organisation of which I am sincerely proud. On the Continent, where so much is still vague, it is most important that the Army should remain in the hands of the Crown. The Austrian Army has for centuries been animated by a special spirit. Men of all countries have belonged to it with incorruptible loyalty. This has been particularly the case during the last hundred years. Only in the year 1848, with all its blunders, did we see the separatist spirit in Hungary. Considering



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the Constitution of Austria, I should regard it as a great misfortune to attempt to exclude foreigners from the Army, or to substitute what is called a National Army for it. An Army that has so successfully and bravely faced the most searching tests, as the Austrian Army has done since 1790, has justified its existence, and ought not to be changed. The reasons of the democrats for their wish to have it changed are transparent.<sup>1</sup>

The advice was not needed. From that time onward, especially under Francis Joseph, it became a settled principle. In so far as the spirit of national separation had entered the heart of the Army, it tended to the fall of the venerable monarchy. Schwartzemberg quite agreed with King Leopold. He replied that he was convinced that the King was right to lay stress on the Army as the first bulwark of the Throne; and that Austria's new Constitution would ensure the retention of the supreme command in the hands of the monarch, who was not in the least disposed to surrender his prerogative. The King again wrote to Schwartzemberg:

All the news about the glorious old monarchy, to which I am cordially devoted, is calculated to fill every friend of Austria with courage and hope. Austria is the key-stone of European policy. Its existence is essential to the maintenance of European equilibrium. That should never be lost sight of, least of all by England, whose best interests are bound up with the solid and independent existence of Austria.<sup>2</sup>

King Leopold had only proposed the Italian compromise because, in view of the Hungarian and other difficulties, he had not thought that Austria would become so completely master of the situation, and he had seen on the horizon the danger of a war which might draw France and England, and even the whole of Europe, into the whirlpool. But he was as far from any wish to promote Italian unity for the sake of the principle of nationality as from the idea of German unity for the

<sup>1</sup> Letter of September 2, 1849 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Letter of November 23, 1849 (State Archives).

sake of uniting all Germans. The principle of nationality did not appeal to him. He had in a sense, owing to his whole life experience, become international; he had shown this in the Italian question. From him neither the patriots in Germany nor those in Italy could hope for support.

## *Chapter XI*

### *THE RISE OF LOUIS NAPOLEON*

**K**ING LEOPOLD'S warning to Austria, not to be too exacting in regard to Prussia, was closely connected with his own interests. There had been a complete change of scene in France, and it was one that gave great concern to the Belgian King, nearly related as he was to the Orléans family.

After the sanguinary experiences of the "July days" there was, all over France, and particularly in the capital, a dread of anarchy, a lively desire of some strong authority. Any man who seemed to promise this to the sorely stricken land was sure of the sympathy of the great majority. Prince Louis Napoleon had seen this, and he had concluded that the hour had come for the realisation of his long-cherished dream of putting himself at the head of the French nation. The name Napoleon had not lost its magic in France. On the contrary, all that had happened since the fall of the great man had served only to keep fresh in the memory of the nation the recollection of the Imperial genius and of the laurels and glories he had won for France.

Hence on the day of the election of a President five and a half million out of the seven million voters gave their support to the Emperor's nephew. It was a severe blow to the Belgian King to find a Napoleon in the highest position in France. Napoleon I had always regarded

the incorporation of Belgium in France as a truism, and had at once effected it. It was very improbable that his nephew would be disposed to act otherwise if he ever had the opportunity. Louis Napoleon's position, however, was still too precarious, and the Republican Constitution was still in force. Possibly the brief Napoleonic dream would roll away once more. King Leopold would, at all events, do everything in his power to attain that end.

It was quite obvious that Louis Napoleon's ultimate aim must be the restoration of the Empire. All the information which the Belgian King received from Paris agreed with that view. If Prussia were entirely humiliated by Austria, and thus an incurable hatred engendered between the two Powers, which might lead to an armed conflict, King Leopold would be as good as handed over to his neighbour, Napoleon, or could count upon the support of England alone. He did all that he could to turn the Queen and Prince Consort against Napoleon; but here again he found himself opposed by Palmerston. The Foreign Minister thought otherwise, and King Leopold knew from experience that Palmerston was a man who could not easily be influenced by his own Queen, still less by a foreign monarch. He had had more than one occasion to know that.

King Leopold's views on Germany changed. He now thought that the most important point was to avoid a struggle between Austria and Prussia. He began to "have a feeling" that the wish of the Germans everywhere, to attain a better position in the political world, was justified. "This was in people's minds especially in the struggle of 1814-15," he wrote to Schwartzenberg, "as an answer to the humiliating way in which the French had treated the Germans." He now suddenly recognised that this was a "practical truth," with a great sentiment in it. "But everything beyond this



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feeling is full of difficulty, even danger," he cautiously concluded.<sup>1</sup> He was so concerned about the new situation that the deaths which occurred in his family about this time had less emotional effect on him than would otherwise have been the case.

From the political point of view the consequences of the death of the ex-King, Louis Philippe, which occurred on August 26, 1851, were not important; and King Leopold had never been intimate with his father-in-law. Both were quite conscious that the marriage was mainly of a political character. But habit and living together do unite people, and when King Leopold's wife, Marie Louise, died soon afterwards, on October 11th, he was sincerely distressed. The loss deeply affected his personal and domestic life. Politically, of course, the death had no consequence.

Although husband and wife had always felt that it was policy alone that had united them, the Queen had proved a faithful and affectionate wife; and it had been a deep affliction to her that he, on his side, had not attached so much importance to faithfulness. Time, however, had attached her to her handsome and universally respected husband. Possibly she had learned to love him; and, while this was not the case on his side, the King, nevertheless, was deeply pained when the woman who had lived so long with him, and had borne his children, lay on her bier.

The letter in which he tells the Archduke of the death of his second wife is, it is true, quite different from that in which he had spoken of the death of his first wife, Princess Charlotte, but he was quite sincere when he wrote to his friend that he had "lost an infinitely devoted friend, the sharer of his thoughts and feelings, one who had no thought but for him, and existed only for him." Certainly the Queen had been a noble, good, and

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Schwartzberg, July 16, 1851.



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exceptionally warm-hearted woman. Her intelligence had, perhaps, not been considerable, and it had often happened that the King spoke harshly to her when she blundered. The King did not appreciate high spirits, and the Queen, fearing to displease him, suppressed, and gradually unlearned, the ingenuous girlish laughter which many a trifle would provoke in her in the early years. She became more and more reserved. The misfortune of her father and her family deeply distressed her. She felt that her position even in regard to her husband was greatly injured. After the expulsion of her father she fell ill, daily dreading the same fate for herself and her husband, and she used up her remaining strength in anxiety and excitement.

Queen Victoria sincerely shared the loss of her uncle. The letter in which she expressed her grief was particularly intimate, and it closed with the words, which she had not used for years: "Always your devoted niece and loving child."

But politics left the King little time to linger in domestic grief. It had become a passion with him, much as games of chance become with some men. His sentiments, his heart, his mind, his health—all were sacrificed to the great passion, or subjected to it. Since the rise of the Napoleonic star the political heavens had grown dark in other places. In Germany, from December 1850 to May 1851, the old Bundestag was more or less reconstructed, but King Leopold looked toward the south with increasing concern, and tried to penetrate Napoleon's secret plans and ideas. "In France," he wrote to Queen Victoria, "there will have to be some sort of outbreak. I do not think Europe was ever in more danger."<sup>1</sup>

The King said "Europe," but he meant, chiefly, himself and his position. He looked in every direction for aid,

<sup>1</sup> Letter of November 10, 1850 (*Letters*, II, 327).



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with a view to securing and strengthening his situation afresh. It had seemed to him that he had made himself quite safe by his relationship with the Orléans family, and now the whole structure had crumbled. He felt that he and his little army were merely a vanguard against France, ready to hold it until a European army of intervention should appear. People still clung to Metternich's intervention system, which had been applied in the case of Italy.

In view of the standing menace of France all the help that was possible must be secured. King Leopold sought a *rapprochement* with the Tsar, who had hitherto avoided relations with the Belgian Court on account of his connection with the Dutch dynasty, which had ruled in Belgium until 1830, and on account of the Polish refugees in the country. Russia, however, now determined to take the first step, and a General Consul was appointed for Brussels.

Metternich, France's old enemy, confirmed King Leopold in his anxiety about the situation in that country. The aged Chancellor did not return to power, but he saw with a good deal of satisfaction the new development of reaction in Austria under Schwartzemberg. The new Chancellor was the most bitter opponent of weakness and vacillation. In this respect his character was very far removed from "Austrian amiability." "To rule well," he once said, "one must, above all things, rule everywhere." He was determined to do that, and he was just the man for the purpose. It was a misfortune for the Empire that he was so soon removed from it.

While King Leopold awakened distrust of Louis Napoleon, the charge was just as sincerely retorted from Paris. Napoleon could not be blamed if he regarded the King as a supporter of the Orléanist party, and therefore hostile to himself. Now, however, it was decided in Paris to go a step farther, and to throw off

the mask. On December 2, 1851, occurred the *coup d'état* which gave France a new Constitution, and made Louis Napoleon President of the Republic for ten years with all the rights of a ruler.

This did not surprise King Leopold. As early as the time of the Presidential election in 1848 he had, as we saw, predicted that there would sooner or later be "a question of Empire." Immediately after the *coup d'état* he wrote to Queen Victoria. He said that he was inclined to think that Louis Bonaparte would succeed, and for a time a good deal might come of it, as the *gloire Française* still looked unalteringly to its old frontiers.

The Queen and the Prince Consort were at first reserved in their feelings, and they desired that the Cabinet should adopt a neutral and passive policy in regard to events in France. But that was not at all to Palmerston's taste. He was delighted at the rise of Napoleon. He had never forgotten Louis Philippe's attitude in the question of the Spanish marriage and on other occasions, and he hailed everything that promised the permanent exclusion of the Orléans family. It looked as if the British Premier had completely forgotten the gigantic struggle of England against Napoleon I. But he correctly appraised the nephew. If the great uncle could be brought down by England, with the aid of its system of alliances, the very much smaller nephew was not likely to be dangerous.

On the other hand, possibly he could be induced to make common cause with England, since his first concern was bound to be for the consolidation of the position he had won. Without saying anything to the Queen, Palmerston let the English Ambassador at Paris know that the Foreign Office approved the *coup d'état*. 

That was too much for the Queen, who had already had occasion to complain of the Minister acting without consulting her. Palmerston's undeniably harsh manner

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in dealing with foreign Powers, his lack of tact in his relations with the Crown, and, not least, the warm remonstrances of King Leopold, led at last to the inevitable sequel. The Queen and Prince Consort insisted on his retirement, taking no care that the English people should not regard his resignation as due to irresponsible and unjustifiable influences. Palmerston, the sturdy Englishman, the man of Liberal ideas, was defeated by reactionary, unconstitutional, possibly foreign, intrigues! Were not the Prince Consort and the Queen's mother Germans? And the trusty Stockmar, who said boldly that Palmerston was insane, and King Leopold, the Queen's uncle, were pure Germans!

Nothing could possibly have made Palmerston more popular than this national folly of his dismissal. King Leopold, it is true, seemed to have reason to rejoice, as he had long wished to see him dismissed, and had, indeed, tried to induce his niece to effect it, out of revenge for 1839. He had, further, come into conflict with Palmerston in regard to his nephew, the King of Portugal, as Palmerston had, to the King's great indignation, telegraphed to Lord Howden at Madrid that "on account of the fearful despotism" which the Queen had exercised in recent years in her dominions, there was no other remedy except a military revolution.<sup>1</sup>

But King Leopold's joy was not unmixed. The dismissal was the starting-point of an attempt to weaken the King's position in Europe and to augment the repute and improve the prospects of the crotchety British Foreign Minister. Both at Paris and in Liberal circles in England people began to point to King Leopold as a man who did nothing but intrigue and stir up the whole world, first against Palmerston, now against Napoleon. The Belgian King was soon compelled to defend himself on every side. He was said, for instance, to have given

<sup>1</sup> Herr von Zarembo to Schwartzemberg, June 4, 1851 (State Archives).

the Austrian Government *les conseils les plus perfides* against the French President.

As a matter of fact, it happens that at that time King Leopold had not written, either privately or otherwise, to either Schwartzberg, the Archduke John, or any other leading man in Austria. He was, therefore, in a position angrily to ask Schwartzberg for a *démenti*. He wrote, with not a little exaggeration :

Since October 1850 I have, as your Excellency knows from your own experience, almost entirely kept out of questions of higher politics. When I have had occasion to say anything, even about France, I have spoken always on the lines that I have always followed since 1848, in the interest of order and of a reasonable and practicable system. The President courageously took that side, and I also spoke entirely in the same sense. My position in European politics is *extremely independent*. *I want nothing, and I want to prevent nothing*, except what seems to me to be dangerous for Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Once more he takes his stand on his independence, disinterestedness, and unselfishness. But when a man claims these virtues for himself, we take the claim with a certain reserve. Assurances of this sort are often rather in the nature of unconscious self-accusations. It was the case here. Formally, the King was quite innocent in regard to the supposed advice to Austria. But it was a matter of chance, for, if he had written at all, he would inevitably have decried Louis Napoleon.

Even Queen Victoria presently began to feel the effect of public opinion, and she thought it necessary to write to her uncle that, while it was natural for him to have no sympathy with Louis Napoleon, since he was related to the Orléans family, this made it doubly incumbent on him to be prudent, and do nothing to provoke Napoleon's hostility. But the warning was followed by a welcome declaration. She said, as William IV had done in his

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Schwartzberg, December 26, 1851 (State Archives).



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time: "Any attempt on Belgium would be *casus belli* for us: that you may rely upon."<sup>1</sup>

The assurance was much needed by King Leopold, as, although the reaction which now prevailed in Europe expected Napoleon also to abandon the Republic and reveal Conservative tendencies, there was a fear that the restoration of the Empire might mean a revival of Napoleonic dreams of aggression and territorial expansion. Schwartzenberg contemplated the plans of the French quite placidly. "The rumours," he wrote to the Belgian King, "that Louis Napoleon wants to take Belgium, and our Emperor Piedmont, are false. No one thinks of doing so." But King Leopold was not so easily reassured. Napoleon had just issued a decree confiscating the property of the Orléans family, which directly affected King Leopold's children. He continued to have grave misgivings about the "ambition for the old golden eagle." To Schwartzenberg, he wrote:

It is quite clear that the uncle's Empire is to be restored. France is to find consolation for all that it has suffered in the greatness and fame of its earlier days. The new creation says: The treaties were directed against us, and we will not only *not sustain them*, but we will *avenge* ourselves on all who, openly or secretly, had any share in them and imposed them on us. . . . There is not much to be said against this feeling. A great military nation is justified in wishing to obliterate a past misfortune by new and brilliant deeds. But, as this can only be done at the expense of other States, which purchased the treaties with their blood, it is proper that these States should see that what they bought at so high a price is not stolen from them by *surprise, fraud, or violence*. The history of 1805-13 must be read over again. To check these ambitions without the loss of valuable forces, and to maintain our possessions, as well as the existing equilibrium, there is only one means—that the three great continental Powers remain closely united, not for *attack*, but to *meet any aggression*. If England can be induced to enter this purely *defensive* alliance, based upon the treaties, it will be a great accession of power.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter of February 3, 1852 (*Letters*, II, 438).

<sup>2</sup> Letter of December 12, 1852 (State Archives).

King Leopold, in other words, wished to restore, for security against France, the alliance which had for so many years maintained the peace of Europe. But the weak points in it now showed themselves ominously. Russia began, with a furtive eye on Austria, to look to the east. This seemed to King Leopold to offer no good prospect for the realisation of his wishes. He felt that he did not get much of a hearing from the excitable Schwartzberg, though the Chancellor was always for co-operation with Russia. The King had his revenge, it is true, in paying little attention to the reactionary suggestions which Schwartzberg, seconded by Metternich, sent to him.

The acting Austrian Ambassador at Brussels, Herr von Zarembo, reported with surprise to Vienna that the King made no advances whatever to the Conservatives of his country, and that Royalty in Belgium was only nominally monarchic, but was in reality democratic.<sup>1</sup> King Leopold would have nothing to do with the bold policy which Austria seemed to follow, under the lead of Schwartzberg. He detested all severe and aggressive action; it was contrary to his whole character. The kind of thing that Schwartzberg was now doing, at home and abroad, was not likely to be copied by the King from the old Empire. Indeed, was Austria still the old Empire? Schwartzberg was merely Palmerston in a white uniform (an Austrian General's uniform), as the Tsar said.

King Leopold wrote, with some warmth, to his niece in England that people in Austria, at all events Schwartzberg, were thoroughly intoxicated. They interfered in the internal affairs of Belgium, although the Empire had scarcely yet restored order in its own house. That was too much. And suddenly, on April 12, 1852, Prince Schwartzberg was, in the midst of his career, struck down by an apoplectic attack. Who can say what tasks

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Schwartzberg, February 12, 1852 (State Archives).

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this statesman had set the world? In any case, King Leopold was not the only man in Europe who would not be thrown into deep mourning by the news of his death.

Anxiety about the southern neighbour was as acute as ever. The King wrote to the Archduke:

The times are wonderful. Formerly I was the advance guard against confusion: now it is against ambition. What the eagle [Napoleon] meant in earlier times we know well, and so do Vienna, Berlin, Moscow, and many other cities. People say that there is nothing really new and true under the sun; that they are only repetitions in different form. There is a good deal of truth in it, and it is a *raison de plus* for not restoring the old when it was not good, whatever sort of skin the wolf may choose to disguise itself in. There is a temptation to many in the present skin, yet its wearer assures us that he still clings entirely to the principle of the *Vox populi*! Wonderful contradictions!<sup>1</sup>

At the same time King Leopold assured the Austrian Ambassador that he was well acquainted with the ambitious and aggressive projects of Louis Napoleon. He was merely waiting for the proper moment to get back the Rhine frontier. In proof of this the King quoted the confidential communication of General Changarnier.

Toward the close of the year 1850, when Germany seemed to be rent by internal dissensions, a war threatened to break out in Hesse between Prussia and Austria, President Louis Napoleon had summoned the General very early one morning, and had asked him if he could rapidly mobilise an army of 120,000 men, in order to be able to recover the former frontiers of the Empire. The President added that he could rely on a great number of his partisans in Belgium and the Rhine Province. The General drew up his plans, but, amongst other matters, pointed out the unsatisfactory condition of the cavalry horses, which would be required for an offensive campaign. While the President and the General waited for an open breach between the two German Powers, they

<sup>1</sup> Letter of May 27, 1852 (Meran Archives).

continued to discuss the preparations for, and organisation of, a war. "We see now," King Leopold said, "what we have to look for from Louis Napoleon."

In view of these dangers King Leopold redoubled his efforts to draw nearer to Russia, especially as the Tsar watched the rise of Napoleon with much concern. In July 1852, the Belgian King, staying in the strictest incognito at Wiesbaden, had seen the Tsarina. He had pressed earnestly for the realisation of his wishes, and he now hoped for the restoration of diplomatic relations, which were still suspended.

He tried to induce as many States as possible to take sides against Napoleon. He knew that Austria was very sensitive, especially in regard to Italian matters, after the events of 1848-9. He therefore hastened to assure Herr von Zarembo that they must be very careful about the policy of the Elysée, as Italy was becoming every day more of an *objet de convoitise* for the enlargement of Napoleon's influence, and he was intriguing there in a way to which Austria could not remain indifferent.<sup>1</sup> He added later that he knew that there were in Napoleon's *entourage* men who promoted disturbance in Italy. He said, emphatically, that he "had precise information that this was a fact."

The King's one consolation was, he said, the knowledge that Louis Napoleon "fortunately had no General, and he was himself anything but a General." Speaking of his outpost position, the King said that he was firmly determined to oppose any invasion, and he would expect the assistance of those who had a common interest in the matter with himself. It was precisely the same position as Belgium had at the outbreak of the Great War, except that it was then Germany, not France, which was to violate Belgium's neutrality.

<sup>1</sup> Herr von Zarembo to Count Buol-Schauenstein, August 26, 1852 (State Archives).



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King Leopold, however, was not content with these and similar expressions to the Ambassadors at his Court. He wanted real assurances and guarantees of help, and in November 1852 he sent a confidential representative to Vienna to ask what support he might expect from the Powers in case of danger. Austria took advantage of this weakening of the King to impress upon him that it was advisable for him to foster the Conservative party in his kingdom and give less support to Liberal Ministers.

At last the long-expected event happened in France. On December 2, 1852, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was, in virtue of a plebiscite (7,800,000 against 250,000 votes), elected Emperor of the French, Napoleon III by the grace of God and the will of the people. King Leopold, however, had succeeded in strengthening his position. His constant plea—"What he [Napoleon] wants is the Empire of 1811! We [the Belgians] are the nearest frontier, *cela va sans dire*"—had made an impression on all the States concerned. He had had a reassuring reply from England, as well as from Austria and Prussia; and even the Russian Ambassador at London was empowered to assure King Leopold that, in the event of any danger from France, he could rely on assistance from Russia.<sup>1</sup>

In view of these assurances King Leopold was, naturally, greatly concerned to keep peace amongst the Powers. The most dangerous part of the situation seemed to him to be the relation of Austria to Prussia, and he took the greatest pains to try to improve it. In a letter to the Emperor Francis Joseph, in which he again evoked the spectre of 1811 and the danger of a revolution, in order to make as clear as possible the need for unity of the three Northern Powers, he spoke of the recent friendly relations of Austria and Prussia.<sup>2</sup> The Belgian King was bound to see that the time had gone by for

<sup>1</sup> Stockmar.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of December 31, 1852 (State Archives).

the old ideas, however sound they might be in themselves : that "the wheels of the chariot of history could not be arrested, and would merely crush any man who attempted it."

In England public opinion had not allowed Palmerston to be long excluded from affairs of State. The former Minister had acted very cleverly, if somewhat unscrupulously, especially as regards the Crown. He had appealed to the Liberal instincts of the masses, represented himself as the victim of foreign influences, and acquired so much popularity that he had to be re-admitted to the Cabinet on December 28, 1852. The Queen, however, so far prevailed that he could only get himself appointed Home Secretary, not Foreign Secretary. Once he was in the Cabinet, naturally, he did not fail to have an influence on foreign affairs. His policy was, as before, friendly to Napoleon ; especially as he was now disposed to counteract the increasing influence of Russia in the East, and for this he urgently needed the friendship of France.

The Queen was slow to follow this policy, but her aversion from Napoleon was, at all events, less pronounced than it had been. But the change in English policy was not yet expressed with sufficient clearness for King Leopold to perceive how much ground he had lost in the country. The first clear indication of this was the feeling against the Prince Consort.

For the time the King felt his position sufficiently assured by the declarations of the Powers, and he found time to contemplate a fresh marriage that would increase his hold on the society of European dynasties. He now thought of marrying his son, the Duke of Brabant, who completed his eighteenth year on April 9, 1853, to an Austrian Archduchess, in order to improve his relations with the venerable Imperial House of Austria. He took his son with him to Vienna, having first ascertained in various ways—partly by correspondence with the Arch-

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duke John—that no difficulties would be put in the way of his wish to marry his son to the Archduchess Marie Henriette, daughter of the Archduke Palatine Joseph of Hungary.

The marriage was not arranged under very favourable auspices. In particular, the poor little Archduchess, who was promised to her future spouse before she had even seen him, would at first not hear of the matter. They gave her no rest, however, and impressed on her from every side what a fine thing it was to become the bride of a King, so that at last she wearily consented. When she spent a day and a half with her uncle, the Archduke Stephen, at Schaumburg, on her way to Brussels, she unburdened her heart to him. She had a great regard for King Leopold, she said, but the engagement left her cold and indifferent. She was not in the least devoted to her future spouse, but felt that she was going to be a sort of hospital nun to take care of a hectic patient.<sup>1</sup>

King Leopold was far too shrewd to have any illusion about the situation, but he thought that time would bring about an improvement. His son was young, but he had more intelligence than was generally supposed, and if the young bride would give her confidence to her father-in-law, all would be well.<sup>2</sup> Emotional elements, love and matters of that kind, did not enter his calculations. He wanted the connection with the Austrian Imperial Family, and the children must be good and obey. He would brook no contradiction.

The Duke of Brabant, afterwards King Leopold II, who was then in a delicate state of health, having inherited weak lungs from his mother, yielded without a protest. They were, therefore, married. But the

<sup>1</sup> Archduke Stephen to Archduke John, August 21, 1853 (Meran Archives.)

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Archduke John, no date, 1853 (Meran Archives).

matter had a darker political side. There had already begun the confusion in the East, in connection with which Austria's position was not regarded in England as friendly. Reactionary Austria was sinking lower and lower in the esteem of the English. Moreover, the new marriage seemed to imply that King Leopold had, with advancing age, passed openly into the reactionary camp, and wished to strengthen it in the eyes of the whole world; though that was certainly not King Leopold's intention.

In France the marriage provoked great discontent. It was regarded almost as an unfriendly act to the French Court, and, at the express command of Napoleon, the French Ambassador took care to be out of Brussels during the marriage festivities. The Emperor Napoleon complained to his friends that Belgium, which ought to be the natural ally of France on account of their common language and their common interests in industry and commerce, had become, on the contrary, the ally of Germany, the advance guard against France, which had, therefore, to be on its guard against Belgium. The unfriendly impression made in connection with King Leopold's last journey outside his own dominion, when the Emperor was entirely ignored, was clearly deliberate. There must be a change.

Napoleon III told a confidant, half in threat, and with a view to its being communicated to King Leopold, that France needed to incorporate Belgium in order to make its position perfectly secure. The only concession he could make to the independence of Belgium was that it must show itself devoted to France *d'esprit, de cœur, et d'intérêts*. This attitude on the part of Napoleon gave the Belgian King grave ground for reflection. He considered the situation generally, and came to the conclusion that the only thing for him to do was, at least, externally, to profess a friendly sentiment in regard to his powerful neighbour.



## *Chapter XII*

### *THE CRIMEAN WAR*

**S**IGNS OF storm now appeared in the east of Europe. The Tsar, one of the few European rulers who had not suffered from the revolutionary movements of 1848-9, had been able to assist Austria in dealing with the rebellion in Hungary. Even in Poland there had been no disturbance. The all-powerful word of the Russian monarch had led Prussia to Olmütz. Austria he regarded as not entirely restored after the events of 1848-9, and the Napoleonic "experiment" had, in his opinion, not materially increased the power of France. It was, therefore, not surprising that the Tsar, as protector of the Conservative idea, assumed a sort of predominant position in Europe, and believed that, as regarded his ambition in the matter of foreign policy, he need only take England into account.

Over-estimating the strength of his position, he thought that the time had come to resume the policy of his great ancestors against Turkey, the weakness and internal troubles of which seemed to him to afford a favourable opportunity to act, and to plant the Russian Eagle instead of the Crescent in the European dominions of the Sultan.

He was quite aware that if he moved in that direction he would find England in his way, and he therefore decided, in order to win England's approval of his plans, to invite that country to share with him the heritage of the Sick Man on the Bosphorus. Important com-

munications to that effect were made to Sir Hamilton Seymour, the British Ambassador at Petrograd. These were the beginning of the Eastern crisis, which was to convulse Europe for the next few years and end in the sanguinary struggle and varying fortunes of the Crimean War. Even the promise of agreeing as to Egypt and Crete did not, however, at that time seem to England sufficient compensation for the immense disadvantage that it would be to the British Empire if Russia, then the strongest power on the Continent, reached Constantinople and the Mediterranean, obtained control of the Straits, and made a sort of Russian inland lake of the Black Sea. It would be a long step toward bringing the whole of Eastern Europe under Russian power and control.

The Tsar was so sure of his strength that he believed he could carry out his plans in spite of England, if it were so foolish as to resist the attractive propositions he held out to it. Perhaps that would be all the better, as it would give him a free hand in dealing with Turkey. He took no notice of England's opposition, and instructed his Envoy Extraordinary, Prince Menschikov, to put the Russian aims as informally as possible before the Sultan. The Russian emissary appeared at the Selamlık in travelling dress, with muddy boots, amongst the gold-bedecked courtiers. In the presence of all the Ministers he made a direct statement of Russia's demands, culminating in a demand for the right to protect the whole of the Christians in Turkey.

The Sultan had, however, learned of the increasing antagonism of the Western Powers to Russia. Relying on their assistance, especially on the support of the Western fleets, he rejected the Russian ultimatum; and the Tsar replied by besieging the Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia.

The idea of an Anglo-French alliance had hitherto,

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in spite of the increasing sympathy of the English nation with Napoleon III, been thwarted by the personal antipathies of the English Court to Napoleon; but the sudden community of interests in the East gave a powerful impulse to the *rapprochement* of the two nations. Napoleon III had sought in vain to connect himself with the English Royal House by marriage. His attempt to win a Spanish Bourbon Princess just after he had been proclaimed Emperor broke down, and a later attempt to secure a marriage with a Swedish Princess had been frustrated by the intervention of the Tsar. He then sought the hand of Queen Victoria's niece, the granddaughter of the Duchess of Kent, Princess Adelaide von Hohenlohe. The project failed, however, as neither the Queen nor the Prince Consort was in favour of it; and especially on account of the opposition of King Leopold, who turned the Princess's father completely against the proposal.

After all these failures the Emperor decided to turn his back on the European Courts, and to summon to his side one of the most beautiful women in Europe in the person of the Countess Eugénie de Teba, an acquaintance of his at Madrid; not forgetting, on the model of the fox and the grapes, to emphasise the "democratic" nature of his marriage, based upon affection, as it was, and not dictated by convention or policy.

The prevention of the English marriage of Napoleon was, in view of King Leopold's known sentiments in regard to the Emperor, a secret triumph for the Belgian King, even if it were not to be attributed entirely to his influence. The King was at the time once more in high favour with his Royal niece, and it was an outward expression of this fact that the Queen's fourth son, born on April 4, 1853, was given the name of his uncle Leopold. It was, however, not long before the Queen perceived, as the attacks upon the Prince Consort increased, that

her uncle's hostile attitude to Napoleon III was injurious both to her and her husband; and for a time this moderated the cordial relations between uncle and niece.

The Emperor Napoleon knew well that King Leopold was not quite innocent in connection with his failure to secure the English marriage. Although he had little inclination for the Belgian King, he felt that perhaps the road to London lay through Brussels, and he expressed less indignation with King Leopold than he would have liked to do. It had become urgently necessary to have an understanding between England and France in view of the aggressive attitude which the Tsar had taken up in the East, and a combined English and French Fleet had, in June 1854, sailed for Besika Bay, not far from Constantinople.

King Leopold watched the efforts of Napoleon with a certain ironic satisfaction over his early failures, yet with an ill-concealed anxiety. He had no personal esteem of Napoleon, whom he called a weather-cock, a man of no depth, superficial in dealing with events, not giving himself the "leisure" to understand them properly.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, for the time the relations between the two monarchs were outwardly improved to some extent. King Leopold said, with an ironic smile, to Baron von Vrints:

The Emperor has *un désir excessif* to be on good terms with me. It is very flattering, but his real aim is to place himself above me (*son but est pourtant de se placer au dessus de moi*).

It was some indication of the position which King Leopold had in Europe that at times even the most powerful monarchs sought his friendship, although in some cases they had no personal regard for him at all. Thus the Tsar, to whom the difficulties raised for him

<sup>1</sup> Baron von Vrints to Count Buol-Schauenstein, September 29, 1853 (State Archives).



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by England soon seemed to be unexpectedly great, forgot his earlier reserves in regard to the King of revolutionary origin, the protector of Polish traitors, and sent a most flattering letter to King Leopold. He praised his wisdom and the good use which the King made of his intimate relations and his personal influence on other Powers in the interest of general peace. The King spoke with pride to the Austrian Ambassador about the Tsar's letter. It was a return of his old power, his former influence on events in Europe. From that time he never ceased to try to increase the power of the Coburg family. In many things he succeeded; but old foes like Palmerston, and new enemies like Bismarck, blocked his way, and checked his movements everywhere.

The Eastern development had taken a threatening turn. Turkey vigorously demanded the evacuation by Russia of the Danube Principalities, and, as the demand was not complied with, war broke out. The menace to British possessions in India from Russia increasingly compelled England to enter into alliance with France, and seek its support in the eventual resistance to the advance of Russia.

King Leopold saw with regret that the position of Napoleon III was steadily improving; that he gained ground even in England, and that the Orléans family had now scarcely any prospect of ever recovering their Throne. Very much against his inclination he began to ask himself the question whether he might not be compelled to make a fundamental change in his attitude toward Napoleon and come to an understanding. To Austria, indeed, he felt himself at once obliged to say that he had succeeded in placing himself on a better footing with Napoleon III, though he had hitherto made no secret of his dislike of that monarch in his communications with the Empire.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Count Buol-Schauenstein, October 12, 1853 (State Archives).

In England it was then believed, and feared, that Russia and Austria might already have discussed a plan for the dismemberment of Turkey. In reality this was very far from being the case. Count Buol-Schauenstein had entered upon his very questionable policy of vacillation. He had already begun to secede from Russia: the greatest blunder which Austria and Germany made at the time, and ever afterwards to the time of the Great War.

In Prussia, on the other hand, nothing of an unfriendly character to Russia was done at that time, though there were considerable forces in that country for the purpose of checking Russia. The King of Prussia was himself then in favour of a *sabotage* of the Western Powers against the East. The fluctuations of the relations of the great Powers to each other were, however, very marked, and the danger of a general war in Europe was very grave.

A humorous paper at the time compared King Leopold, whose constant intervention everywhere had gradually come to the knowledge even of foreigners, to a fireman to whom everybody had recourse whenever there was danger of an outbreak of fire. There was a good deal of truth in the comparison. Ever concerned lest his own house should be attacked by the flames, he was constantly on the watch for the task of extinguishing a conflagration. He now again tried his fortune in this respect, turning first to England, where both the Queen and the Prince Consort were averse from the idea of war.

But the mass of the nation, English public opinion, was entirely in favour of war, and the result was the singular spectacle of the sovereign of the country resisting the notion of war with Russia while the majority of her subjects enthusiastically called for it. King Leopold noted the increasing antagonism of sentiment, but he did not appreciate its fundamental character. He was

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in some position to judge, as in November 1853 he had passed some time in England. Amongst others with whom he had a long conversation was Palmerston; and this left him with the impression that Palmerston was working entirely for war with Russia.

From the Tsar, the Belgian King had lately received a very satisfactory and conciliatory letter, and he had made what use he could of this in England in the cause of peace. Even the Emperor Napoleon had been induced to enter into correspondence with King Leopold, and between the lines of his letters the King thought that he could read that the Emperor was now disposed to respect existing treaties, and therefore, indirectly, he would respect the inviolability of Belgium.

The Belgian King was inclined to attribute these approaches to his position as senior amongst the monarchs of Europe, but they were really inspired by selfish sentiments. The Emperor Napoleon, in particular, had something in view for which he needed the support and assistance of King Leopold, and the advantage of his influence in England. At the time the Belgian King knew nothing about the Emperor's new project of marrying a member of his family to an English Princess.

For a time there was some idea of summoning a general conference of the Powers, and it was possible that it might be held at Brussels; but the idea was abandoned almost as soon as it was mooted. The destruction of the Turkish Fleet by the Russian at Sinope had greatly embittered the Western Powers. In England, especially, feeling ran very high. There was great anger because the British Government did not at once take action, particularly as there was a suspicion that Russia intended to march upon Afghanistan.

Someone must be responsible for this slackness, and public feeling sought some person on which it might

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expend itself. There then occurred an interlude which facilitated matters. On December 16, 1853, it suddenly became known in London that Palmerston had the intention of resigning his post. An article appeared in his organ, the *Morning Post*, giving as the reason for his action the conduct of the Government on the Eastern question. Although Palmerston withdrew his letter of resignation a few days later, and remained in the Cabinet, what had happened sufficed to induce the general public to throw the responsibility upon the Court, especially upon the Prince Consort, the foreigner, the German, the Coburger. England had been betrayed and sold in the interest of the Coburgs, for the sake of his uncle, the King of Belgium, for the profit of Germany and the Eastern Powers. There was a cry of "Treason" in the streets. Thousands of people met in front of the Tower, and people generally credited the rumour, which spread through the city, that the Prince Consort was to be imprisoned in it! So far did the nationalist spirit carry part of the English nation. The Queen was very indignant and very deeply hurt. Her devoted, loyal, stainless, conscientious spouse to be thus dragged into the gutter! Indeed, she was dragged with him, for she loved him, and loved him a thousand times more deeply in his misfortune.

The storm, however, passed over. The Prince was publicly vindicated in the House of Commons. But the Vienna Conferences, which were at the last moment to seek a peaceful solution of the Oriental crisis, broke down. England got its war. The events were a warning to King Leopold to be more prudent. He, as uncle, had been aimed at in the person of the Prince Consort. In the eyes of many he seemed to be a sort of providence watching over his niece and nephew in England.

He recognised that he could not swim against the stream alone, and that war was inevitable. At his New



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Year reception at Brussels he made several observations which were intended as a hint to his country to be on its guard, to prepare itself for grave eventualities, to look forward to the vicissitudes of a general war, and possibly to the need of self-sacrifice. Hitherto the King had found that the revolution in France had encountered only an unstable and temporary master in Napoleon. He now gradually realised that he was mistaken. He must, in the interest of the position of his relatives in England, more and more overcome his antipathy to Napoleon.

These reflections meant, at least for the time, a change in the attitude of the Belgian King in regard to his southern neighbour. He began to draw inferences from the situation; and, as Napoleon, on his side, wanted something of King Leopold, a bridge was soon found. First the King sent the Prince de Chimay, who was devoted to him, to Paris, to prepare the ground. His friend learned from the Emperor that he wanted to marry a Prince of his family to an English Princess. The idea was to marry Prince Jerome Napoleon to Princess Mary of Cambridge. In spite of his good resolutions, however, King Leopold could not bring himself to work in England for the promotion of this marriage; but he sent word that he would be pleased to welcome the Prince to his own capital.

The Emperor, hitherto avoided by all the members of the ruling Houses of Europe, and never visited by anybody, trusted that through the King of Belgium he would at least enter into personal relations with the English Court. He therefore, accepted the invitation for the Prince, and sent him to Brussels.

This was the starting-point of better relations between the Coburg family and Napoleon III. King Leopold, however, could not yet make up his mind to go to Paris, although he was quite aware that a return visit was

expected for the visit of Prince Jerome. He therefore gladly accepted the offer of his nephew, the reigning Duke, Ernest II of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, to return the visit at Paris. The Duke has fully described it in his reminiscences. As this visit broke the ban which the Princely Houses of Europe had laid upon Paris, the Prince had a brilliant reception in the French capital. The Coburger had previously discussed the matter with his uncle at Brussels, and he had received very cautious advice how to conduct himself.

It was particularly necessary to be careful in discussing the larger questions of European policy and not to speak with any hostility about the Tsar. King Leopold further advised the Duke to leave the talking as far as possible to the Emperor: a thing which he was not anxious to do. Courtesy, prudence, caution—that was the quintessence of the Royal counsels. When the Duke made his visit to Napoleon in the early days of March, both Princes were quite aware that Russia could not be induced by mere threats to keep the peace.

King Leopold was quite satisfied with the results of his nephew's visit, but he adhered firmly to the view that England should not take up an attitude of hostility to the Tsar. The antipathy to Napoleon was too strong. It was from no deep sentiment that the King himself entered into relations with him. Although he saw that England and France were determined to make war, he made one more attempt, as far as it was in his power, to avert the war at the last moment. This time he applied his lever in another quarter. Possibly, he thought, he could move the Emperor Francis Joseph to exercise an indirect influence on Russia. In that sense he wrote to the Emperor about the middle of February:

All say they wish to maintain Turkey and the existing treaties. And if this is so, as one may very well believe, it ought to be possible to find a way in which all parties can be satisfied. Your Majesty

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will render a great service to Russia by inducing it to refrain from a grave war. Russia needs no conquests. The influence which it seeks to acquire in the East is already given to it by its position. If it destroys Turkey, the result will be a frightful chaos out of which Russia itself will scarcely come unscathed, and which may call into existence elements that no one may be able to control.

I have tried briefly to call the Tsar's attention to the efforts of the Anarchist parties in every country. On every side war is regarded as the great means of bringing on revolution. Is it in the interest of Russia to open these sluices of abomination? I do not think so.<sup>1</sup>

King Leopold was dangling the old spectre before the eyes of the two Conservative monarchs, but this time it had no effect whatever. The answer of Francis Joseph was full of reassuring phrases, but there was no positive expression in it. It was composed by Count Buol, and merely signed by the Emperor. All that there was in it was an expression of the unfortunate, at the time vague and colourless, policy of that statesman.<sup>2</sup>

In England there was a general and violent demand for war, and on March 12th an alliance was concluded between England, France, and Turkey. On the 27th the declaration of war was transmitted to Russia. There was no question now of trying to avert war, but King Leopold at once began to seek some means of making it as short as possible. As early as April 10, 1854, a fortnight after the declaration of war, he wrote to the Archduke John that they must watch for the first opportunity to bring it to a close.<sup>3</sup> He was gravely concerned lest it might lead to a general European conflagration.

In August Austria approached the Western Powers, and joined them in the demands that were to be made of Russia. Now that Austria seemed to lean to the side of the Western Powers, King Leopold feared that

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Francis Joseph, February 16, 1854 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Francis Joseph to King Leopold, February 26, 1854 (State Archives).

<sup>3</sup> Letter of April 10, 1854 (Méran Archives).

England would put forward exaggerated demands. He had in mind all the time the campaign of 1812, and he thought of infinite complications which might come to involve some danger to himself and his country. There was, however, nothing to be done. The King's power was too weak to secure a hearing for him. As he wrote to the Austrian Emperor:

The majority in the English Cabinet would listen to moderation, but it is not free. It is dominated by public opinion, and that is so exalted that its favourite theme is the destruction of Russia.<sup>1</sup>

Buol, on his part, wanted to persuade King Leopold to work in England and France for a peaceful compromise. "My Emperor," he said, "was loyal to his policy of avoiding as far as possible any share in war." Buol had to reckon with his Imperial master. He himself would have joined in the war on the side of the Western Powers, but the Emperor and the Army were entirely opposed to war with Russia. Buol was not the man to impute his own sentiments to his monarch, as Bismarck so masterfully did in the case of the Emperor William. This division led to the unfortunate policy followed by Austria during the Crimean War. One step forward and two backward was the motto.

Buol's letter came rather too late. It did not reach King Leopold before he visited Napoleon at Calais. It was with considerable reluctance that the Belgian King paid this visit, in the early days of September, but it was a precedent for improved relations of the English Royal Family also with Napoleon III. Shortly after it the Prince Consort had an important interview with the French Emperor. The Emperor knew how deeply Queen Victoria was attached to her husband, and he approached her on her weak side by sending her a letter in which he expressed the highest admiration of the

<sup>1</sup> Letter of August 19, 1854 (State Archives).



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character and qualities of the Prince. The relations between the two Courts became more and more cordial, and their policy was increasingly withdrawn from the influence of King Leopold. It was, therefore, useless of Francis Joseph to press him, at the beginning of September, to use all his influence to bring the Allied Powers of the West to listen to moderate counsels.

The war dragged on in spite of all these efforts, and no one now listened to the incessant attempts to mediate of the Belgian King. At length he himself wearied of them. He wanted to free himself from all political and other worries, and in spite of the universal talk of war, he took a "holiday," as he called it, of several weeks at the end of September. He went to a small place of his on Lake Como, the beautiful situation of which he describes enthusiastically in his letters to the Archduke.

He was, however, not long relieved of affairs. He had scarcely returned home when he again took up international politics, and resumed his efforts at mediation at the point where he had dropped them. In view of the actual situation he now considered that it was best for Austria to take sides entirely and unreservedly with the Western Powers. That was also Buol's programme, and, as a fact, Austria entered the alliance of the Western Powers on December 2, 1854.

This deeply offended Russia, which made bitter reflections on the ingratitude of the Austrian Emperor, but the latter was really, in spite of the treaty he signed, determined as far as possible to avoid war with Russia, and was not at all prepared to proceed at every step with the Western Powers. At the time Francis Joseph wrote to King Leopold that he was still trying to restore peace as speedily as possible, before Austria would be compelled to add the sacrifice of her blood. But the Western Powers had not admitted Austria to

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their alliance for that purpose. They were dissatisfied, and Austria was thus soon at loggerheads with both sides.

The secession from Russia was the starting-point of the destruction of Austria as well as of Russia. The Holy Alliance would have been, until the outbreak of the Great War, the surest guarantee of the maintenance and prosperity of the two States, as well as of Germany, assuming that an understanding with England was not possible, or was not desired. Bismarck recognised this. The Austrian Foreign Ministers, especially such as were of Hungarian nationality in the Austro-Hungarian Government, were blinded by their desire of revenge for 1849. It was they who deepened the gulf; but it was the Austrian Count Buol who began it. In Germany the turning-point of the policy as regards Russia was the dismissal of Bismarck. For all three Powers the departure from the policy of the Holy Alliance, without a closer understanding with England, was fraught with the most terrible consequences.

While Austria pursued its ambiguous policy, Prussia, thanks to the advice of Bismarck, and in spite of all its negotiations, generally stood aside. King Leopold passed a very severe judgment on Prussia's attitude, saying that it was always "acting behind people's backs and could not be induced to follow a peaceful and consistent policy."<sup>1</sup> But those in Austria who thought that they were on better terms with Prussia were mistaken. Prussia was much embittered by Austria's design to drag it into the conflict, and the King had written a very angry letter about Austria to King Leopold in the latter part of December.

King Leopold had long since ceased to expect to find a deliberate, clear, and impartial policy on the part of Prussia. It was not yet quite evident that a master hand was directing foreign policy in Prussia, but King

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Archduke John, December 30, 1854 (Meran Archives).

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Leopold had a semi-conscious feeling of uneasiness. He felt that here also his advice and his repute had begun to count for less.

Moreover, it was a complete departure from the policy hitherto consistently represented by the Belgian King when Queen Victoria decided to put Palmerston, his old opponent, at the head of the English Cabinet, in order to end the wasteful, tepid, and blundering way in which the war had been conducted up to that time. There was at once a sharper strain in the conduct of both diplomatic negotiations and the war. Then, at the happiest moment for England, on March 2nd, the Tsar Nicholas died. He was a man who would hardly have consented to peace even after defeat. He would have fought to the bitter end, and the issue would have been quite different for the Western Powers.

Naturally, under Palmerston's lead the relations of England with the Emperor Napoleon were very greatly fostered. Napoleon had never forgotten the letter of recognition which Palmerston had sent him immediately after the *coup d'état*. A visit of Napoleon to England was presently followed by a return visit of the Queen and the Prince Consort to Paris. The Queen, who had previously hardly crossed the frontiers of her kingdom, was delighted with Paris, with the enthusiastic reception accorded her there, and with the thousand touching attentions which Napoleon III took care to have paid her. Deeply moved, she repaid the generosity of her guests by visiting the tomb of the great Corsican.

Still under the impression of her wonderful journey, the Queen wrote enthusiastically to her uncle. King Leopold read with mixed feelings this outpouring of genuine ecstasy. Napoleon had made a deep impression on her and had entirely won her. "He is," she said after her return, "a very *extraordinary* man, with great qualities there can be no doubt—I might almost say a

mysterious man.”<sup>1</sup> The impulsive Queen was “delighted, enchanted, pleased, and interested.”

King Leopold had to learn his lesson from this and be more amiable with Napoleon. Otherwise, in view of this spirit on the part of his niece, he might find himself in a position of complete isolation in the West. But he was not wholly clear as to the ultimate aims of the French Emperor. About the middle of March he had written to the Archduke John :

My neighbour in Paris is wavering. He willingly does something for his Army, and he carries on the great war not unwillingly. But he shrinks from the consequences for France, where his position is brilliant, and he is absolute master of all, no matter to what school they belong.<sup>2</sup>

In April, he added : “I cannot make out my neighbour. He seems to desire the great war and to want to see Austria involved in a strenuous fight with Russia.” His anxiety about his neighbour continued. But the war continued in its dramatic course, and in September (1855) Sebastopol fell. Austria continued to press for a termination of the war. Buol wanted to summon the Peace Congress at Vienna, but the stronger position of Napoleon III found some expression in the fact that the Congress was to be held at Paris. Vienna, in any case, was not likely to be chosen, because the attitude of Austria had offended all the Powers, friendly or hostile.

Although King Leopold adhered firmly in his own mind to Austria, he did not refrain from criticism. He pointed out very clearly to the Austrian Ambassador at Brussels that the Imperial State was not understood by anybody ; that the English made fun of it, the French had ceased to respect it, Germany and Prussia were in spite of their own interests, not attached to it, and Russia had, naturally, very unfriendly feelings.

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, III, 155 (May 2, 1855).

<sup>2</sup> Letter of March 14, 1855 (Meran Archives).



## THE CRIMEAN WAR

That was certainly a very unfortunate outcome of Buol's policy. King Leopold, however, defended it. People had, he said, "misunderstood it, and not properly appreciated it." His feeling for Austria coloured his ideas. According to King Leopold's way of conceiving the matter, Austria was the only Power that had attained the "aim of the war," the maintenance of the independence of Turkey, with its courageous and loyal adherence to the treaties. We may add that it paid for this by losing the sympathy of nearly the whole of Europe. This result was equivalent to a defeat of the Austrian policy, and therefore also to a failure on the part of the King who defended it.

The Peace Congress at Paris, moreover, affirmed the settlement that had been reached in entire opposition to King Leopold's views. The alliance of the three Northern Powers, which he had so long advocated, was broken up. There was open hostility between Russia and Austria; and there was anything but a good understanding between Prussia and Austria. The Emperor Napoleon, whom he so much feared, had the lion's share of the victory. The peace was dictated in his capital. Lord Palmerston was at the head of the British Government, and he controlled the country's fortunes in close co-operation with France.

King Leopold must have admitted to himself that he had failed. In the settlement of the Eastern question of the last few years he had not played a prominent, certainly not a decisive, part. The structure of his power began to totter. His influence was waning. New men came upon the stage, and with their modern ideas they began to take precedence of the ageing monarch.

## *Chapter XIII*

### *RELATIONS WITH NAPOLEON III*

THE EVENTS of the last few years must have convinced King Leopold that he no longer held in Europe the position he had once held; that he had sensibly lost influence upon the fate of the world. But he had no idea of relaxing his exertions and thus acknowledging that he had become too old to take his share in mastering the ever-recurrent thorny problems of European politics. In particular, his creation of new family connections by arranging marriages had borne such good fruit that he never ceased to look out for opportunities of the kind.

In the recent period he must have perceived that his attitude on the question of German unity and his leaning to Austria had led to an appreciable chill in his relations with Prussia. He had at first not thought it necessary in that case to seek to acquire influence by bringing about a matrimonial connection. His German origin, his family connections, and his Coburg brothers and nephews seemed to him to afford security enough that, if occasion arose, he could get a hearing for his suggestions at the Prussian Court. But the reigning Duke of Coburg, Ernest II, was a man of Liberal ideas, and he was, especially in German questions, strongly opposed to his uncle. Moreover, King Leopold had himself only brief and occasional correspondence with the Prussian Court.

He preferred to have at that Court a person who should

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be closely connected with himself and devoted to him. An opportunity arose when it was learned that the Crown Prince Frederick William had reached the stage when he must marry. King Leopold's daughter, Princess Charlotte, also was of marriageable age. It has been said that the King sounded Berlin on the subject, but received no encouragement whatever. We do not find any confirmation of this statement, but it is not improbable. The Belgian King, however, was not so easily beaten. If his daughter were not acceptable, then some other relative of his must be chosen as the spouse of the future King of Prussia. She must be a quite suitable "party," but she must also be what King Leopold wanted.

It would at the time have been best to choose a marriage which united the English and Prussian Courts. England was the first and most vital guarantor of the independence and inviolability of Belgium, and Prussia was the natural enemy of the dangerous French neighbours to the south. If an English Princess could have been introduced into the Prussian Court, it would, on account of the relationship, have been easier to obtain Coburg influence there. If a daughter of Queen Victoria were chosen, it would mean that some day a grand-niece of King Leopold would be Queen of Prussia. Queen Victoria's eldest daughter was, it is true, then only fifteen years old, or much too young; yet the advantages seemed to be so great that the Belgian King decided to speak to his niece on the matter.

The Queen was not indisposed to consider it. She had eight children, and the task of providing suitably for each of them would be difficult. It would not be very easy to find a Throne for her daughter. Hence by the beginning of 1855 the idea of the marriage was being discussed. The young prince, Frederick William, was unostentatiously invited to the English Court; a matter of no great difficulty, as the Princess was a mere child, and no one would think of marriage. Chance, and the

sincere attachment to each other which they formed, came to the aid of the scheme. The Princess was remarkably advanced in development for her age. She had a quick intelligence and lively powers of conversation. This is not merely the opinion of her mother, who was very proud of the child, but of other contemporaries who formed a more critical judgment of the young Princess.

Things developed along the lines desired by King Leopold, the Queen, and the Prince Consort. The latter was, in fact, the most ardent advocate of the engagement. Probably the subject had been discussed by him and the Belgian King long before it was mentioned to the Queen. On the other hand, it was no small matter to Frederick William to wed the daughter of the Queen of England. At the end of September (1855), therefore, the Queen was able to announce to her uncle that their wishes in regard to the engagement of "Vicky," as the young Princess was familiarly called at home, were in a very fair way of being realised.

Whether Prince Albert or King Leopold was the original author of the plan, there was now a prospect of seeing a representative of the Anglo-Coburg family firmly established in a high position at the Prussian Court. As the Princess was so young, however, it was desirable to keep the matter strictly secret ; but the English Liberals had very sharp eyes, and the nephew of King Frederick William IV, who was regarded as reactionary, was not likely to be welcome to them. Hence the matrimonial plan was openly discussed and opposed in a leading article of *The Times* on October 3, 1855.

There were also many opponents on the Prussian side, Bismarck was from the start strongly opposed to the marriage, and he remained to the end of his life very sourly disposed toward the accomplished fact. As, however, the secret was now out, the only thing to do was to announce



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the betrothal. The latest plan of a Coburg marriage had succeeded.

It was now necessary to find an equally suitable spouse for Charlotte, the Belgian King's daughter. There were many possible candidates, and it was possible to choose. First was a near relative, Don Pedro, son of Ferdinand of Coburg-Koháry, King of Portugal, a grand-nephew of King Leopold. Queen Victoria was very strongly in his favour. She urgently recommended him to her uncle, and maintained that he had most excellent qualities. King Leopold himself seemed at first inclined to fall in with her suggestion ; but there then appeared on the stage an Austrian Archduke, Ferdinand Max, brother of the Emperor. King Leopold now saw a new and great perspective opening before his mental eyes. The brother of the powerful Emperor might obtain a great influence on the monarch, or might, indeed, himself be summoned to an exalted task. King Leopold's ambition, transmitted to his son-in-law, was to prove a tragic fate to him.

The King wrote to Queen Victoria that he would, for his part, prefer Don Pedro, but that Princess Charlotte had herself, "uninfluenced," decided otherwise. But he at the same time betrayed himself to some extent by telling his niece the high position which the Emperor Francis Joseph destined for his brother. He was first to be appointed "Governor of Venice." The rest was left open.

At first, therefore, King Leopold was not in harmony with the wishes of his niece in regard to the marriage. That was unfortunate, and it might have undesirable consequences for his future son-in-law. Hence he hastened to write to Buol at Vienna that, through his marriage, the Archduke Max would become nearly related to his niece, the Queen of England, and, as it was always very desirable that Austria should avail itself of every opportunity to improve its relations with England, it

would be a good thing if the Archduke paid a visit to England as soon as possible.

His idea of making the Queen acquainted with his future son-in-law, and so reconciling her to the marriage, succeeded beyond all expectations. The charming Archduke, a very handsome young man of knightly bearing, made a rapid conquest of Queen Victoria. In her impulsive way she found him "charming, so clever, natural, kind, and amiable."<sup>1</sup> They were married in July 1857, and their married life opened very happily, with no presentiment of the tragedy which was later to fall upon it.

Meantime King Leopold had secured further personal triumphs in his own country. He had every reason to be contented. It is easy to decide whether a jubilee celebration is carried out merely to order and as a matter of form, or springs really from the heart of the people. The Belgian nation had good cause to be grateful to its King. The independence of their country was secured. Trade and commerce prospered. Nearly every individual Belgian was much richer than he had been at the time when the King had taken over the reins of government.

Moreover, the very obvious and influential position of the King in regard to European policy might very well fill with pride the heart of everyone of his subjects. All this was outwardly expressed in the celebration of the silver jubilee of his reign. Stockmar tells us that, *ceteris paribus*, he had "never seen or heard of such a triumph." Yet the incense offered to him did not prevent the King from continuing to keep his eyes wide open to everything that happened in Europe. Every event had interest for him. He interfered with his counsels and suggestions everywhere; though, in this last phase of his career, it often happened that they were not regarded.

There was an instance of this in the case of Naples. King Ferdinand II had introduced an Absolutist and

<sup>1</sup> Letter to King Leopold, June 16, 1857 (*Letters*, III, 297).

coercive regime which flouted every principle of liberty that had been recognised in the Western countries. There were soon all kinds of disorders, and a frightful situation arose, particularly in Sicily. The King himself only escaped assassination by a hair's breadth.

King Leopold had warned him long before of the storm that threatened him, and had advised him to be moderate. "But," as the Belgian King says, "King Ferdinand likes to do everything himself, and he was content in his reply to vindicate his manner of governing." He now had cause to regret, for it was the beginning of the end of Bourbon rule in Sicily.

In regard to the attitude of Napoleon the Belgian King remained to the last in a condition of anxiety. Indeed, he regarded the situation in France as menacing. He considered that public morality degenerated there until all feeling for it had disappeared. He thought that Napoleon's *entourage* had a considerable share in this decay; that the Emperor's conduct in regard to obligations he had incurred was very questionable. He felt therefore, that he must regard the whole situation, the frame of mind and reliability of the French, with great distrust. Count Walewski, the French Foreign Minister, a natural son of Napoleon I and the beautiful Pole Lanzinska, he described as "a thorough scoundrel."<sup>1</sup> He was quite convinced that Napoleon had something to do with the trouble in Italy. According to his statements to Austria, King Leopold had vainly entreated the French Emperor to put himself in opposition to any movement in Italy, but he was under no illusion whatever. Napoleon would do in Italy whatever he thought best in his own interest.

The Belgian King had now no sympathy with the idea of the unity of Italy. He clung to Austria, as he had

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Baron von Vrints to Count Buol, December 16, 1856 (State Archives).

formerly done on the question of Germany. He spoke of Cavour as *un homme abominable*. This, of course, was in talking to the Austrian Ambassador. On other occasions he was more cautious. He was not at all ingenuous with the enemies of Austria. As far as England was concerned, he could not see how it had any real interest in a purely sentimental policy in favour of Italy; especially now that Sardinia was entirely devoted to the French Emperor. Russia also could afford to be indifferent to what was happening in Italy, but since 1856 every Russian was deeply embittered against Austria.

King Leopold continued to be anxious about the development in Italy, where the movement for unification spread rapidly, and everybody looked hopefully to Cavour and Napoleon. In addition, he was, in the early summer of 1857, much concerned about events in his own kingdom. The Conservative-Catholic Party, which had the majority in the Chamber, entered upon a quarrel with the Liberals in regard to a law concerning philanthropic institutions. Violent debates in Parliament were followed by disturbances in the streets of the capital. Some of the Catholic deputies were attacked, and there was a good deal of disorder.

King Leopold was not the man to allow any further extension of this trouble. He at once summoned troops from all sides to the capital, and he announced, with remarkable vigour, that he would defend the liberty of the Constitution against every attack, whichever side it came from. He complained bitterly of the untruthfulness and malice of the Press, saying that it inflamed the people and was largely responsible for the disorders. At last he succeeded in restoring the tranquillity which had, with few exceptions, prevailed in his capital and dominion ever since the establishment of the Kingdom.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Count Buol-Schauenstein, June 12, 1857 (State Archives).



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The King was able to devote his whole attention once more to foreign politics. It was particularly important to watch Napoleon, although he was at that time more concerned about the South-east than the North. It seemed to the Belgian King, however, that the turn of the North might come when he had done with the South. He was, like the aged King Jerome Napoleon, who then lived in the Tuileries, convinced that Napoleon III would wage one war after another. King Jerome also believed that, like his great uncle, Napoleon III would lose his Throne as a consequence of war. He had said this in 1854 in conversation with Duke Ernest II of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha at Paris.<sup>1</sup>

For the moment Italy was the burning question. Sardinia was about to claim the reward for its active share in the Crimean War. Cavour had already declared to the Paris Congress that there could be no lasting peace in Europe until Italy was independent and united. Moreover, Napoleon III had already introduced into European politics the principle of the "self-determination of peoples."

The chief sufferer in the Italian business was bound to be Austria, and it was already in an extremely precarious position, apart from politics. During the Crimean War it had succeeded in alienating the combatants on both sides, and it was now more or less completely isolated.

For some time it had seemed to the Emperor Napoleon that Austria was too large and powerful. As early as October 1854 he had made a remark to that effect to Baron von Hübnér. In the course of a conversation with the Baron he removed his cigarette—he smoked cigarettes in great numbers, lighting one from the other—strode rapidly to a map of Europe that was hanging on the wall, and cried: "They have an enormous amount of territory, from the Milanese and Vorarlberg to the Black Sea."

<sup>1</sup> Ernest II, *Aus meinem Leben und aus meiner Zeit*, s. 242.

Hübner wittily retorted that the armies of the Emperor of the French occupied the three great cities of the ancient world, and that was not bad.<sup>1</sup>

But, in spite of all his verbiage and his itching for popularity, Napoleon's zeal to work for the unification of Italy was only a cloak for his own desires. His co-operation was not to be had for nothing. He wanted to make his people a characteristically Napoleonic gift of Savoy and Nice.

The unity of Italy could only be purchased at the price of a war with Austria, and the antagonism between France and Austria developed accordingly. King Leopold watched the development with concern, and at length tried once more to play the part of providence. In September 1857, Napoleon was to make a short visit to Stuttgart. The Belgian King seized the opportunity to make this known to Count Buol and suggest that Austria, as head of the German Confederation, ought to adopt some measure of courtesy, and send someone, perhaps the aged Prince Windischgraetz, to greet the Emperor. Buol refused. He had all sorts of suspicions; though the step might at least have put him in the way of acquiring useful information. He feared that it might be taken amiss in Berlin.

As the power of France grew, England lost a little of its cordiality in regard to that country. The popular admiration of the Emperor had notably declined. Napoleon perceived the fact, and it caused him to waver once more in his war plans. But there then occurred an event which forced him to advance against his will. On January 14, 1858, Orsini attempted to assassinate the French Emperor. The Royal couple escaped as if by a miracle the terrible effects of the bomb which exploded between the horses of their carriage. They had to be taken

<sup>1</sup> At the time they were in Athens as well as Rome and Constantinople. The Ambassador sent home an account of the incident (October 11, 1854).

to a place of safety over the mangled bodies of guards and horses. The armour-plated carriage, which had been built for the security of Louis Philippe, and was in places very strongly fortified, was a wreck. Yet the Royal couple suffered only a few scratches, in addition to the shock.

Orsini and his accomplices had come from England. The plot had been drafted and worked out there, and the English Press made some fiery comments on the matter. The 82nd Regiment of the French Infantry of the Line sent to the Emperor an address in which it offered to be the vanguard of the Army if it were decided to attack in their lairs these wild beasts who came from foreign lands to fill the streets of Paris with blood. That was a hit at England.

King Leopold read with strained attention the news of the outrage. One is almost tempted to say that in his heart he must have regretted that Orsini was not more successful. He, of course, never said that ; but he must have felt it. At all events, it was clear that people in England were no longer so enthusiastic about Napoleon, and King Leopold would assuredly do anything in his power to encourage the change of feeling ; but there must be no question of a war. He did not at first appreciate that Orsini's attempt, which was inspired by national motives, would have the effect of making Napoleon take up more speedily the championship of the unification of Italy.

At the end of January, Princess Victoria was married to Frederick William of Prussia. The bride walked to the altar between her father, the Prince Consort, and King Leopold. It was a sort of symbol. Moreover, the Belgian King did not lose his opportunity during this stay in England. He was incessantly firing people against Napoleon. For his part, he said, he thought it quite possible to keep on good terms with the French, but



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there was a party in England that wanted the Queen to be on cordial terms with the French nation. That could not possibly be. "The French," he wrote to Queen Victoria, "dislike the English as a nation, though they may be kind to you also personally."<sup>1</sup>

His old opponent and Napoleon's old friend, Palmerston, set out to check him. He submitted to the Queen that she ought to resume friendly relations with the Emperor. The misunderstanding which had arisen after Orsini's attempt would be buried at a brilliant meeting at Cherbourg. With a parade of his Fleet, with oratory and bubbling champagne in flower-decked reception halls, Napoleon tried once more to lull the suspicions of the Queen. There was no longer any need of anxiety from the side of England. There would be no immediate trouble there. Italian matters he must, for the present, leave alone, if he had any care for his life.

Shortly after being at Cherbourg, Queen Victoria paid a short visit to her uncle; almost as if she had a guilty conscience, and wanted to defend her action. Certainly the Belgian King had by no means rejoiced to see the visit to France. He continued to warn the whole world against Napoleon. At the end of March 1858, he had written to Austria that Napoleon's ideas were turning more and more freely to Italy. King Victor Emmanuel had shortly before, when he returned from Paris, said: "Let us first get our finances in good order and save a little, and then we can manage a great war in Italy."<sup>2</sup> Austria must be on its guard. A little later King Leopold added that Napoleon would not be able to make his influence felt in Italy so much if he could not count on the disunity of Austria and Prussia. He, therefore, advised Austria to make sure first of its alliance with Prussia and the rest of Germany, and let this be known to

<sup>1</sup> Letter of July 16, 1858 (*Letters*, III, 375).

<sup>2</sup> Letter of Baron von Vrints to Count Buol, March 29, 1858 (*State Archives*).

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Napoleon. That would be the best protection against the dangers in Italy.

The King made similar efforts in a correspondence with the Prince Regent William of Prussia. At the end of October he send word to Austria that Napoleon's sentiments were more and more hostile, and that the end of it all might be a disturbance of the general peace. "Napoleon," he told Baron von Vrints, "is possessed by a feeling of increasing hatred, accuses the Imperial Governor [in Lombardy] of perfidy, and does not conceal his desire to see you swept out of Italy." Thus he warned Austria, and counselled it at the same time to regain the confidence of its Hungarian population; as he feared that France and Russia would "intrigue" there also. Russia, he insisted, was dangerous, as all the Russians he had had an opportunity of meeting that summer, especially Count Kisseleff and the Grand Princess Helene, breathed nothing but hate and revenge against Austria, and sought some means of redeeming Russia from the humiliation which the Crimean War had put upon it.

The warning against Russia was only a piece of bluff. King Leopold knew from a sure source, and he repeatedly said this during the crisis of 1859, that Austria had not directly to fear a war with Russia. For Austria's opponent, Napoleon III, was the author of the coalition against Russia in the Crimean War. In spite of all disapproval of the attitude of Austria during that war the Russians had no idea of enabling the French Emperor to win a new triumph. That was the chief reason why Russia did not attack Austria in 1859.

King Leopold was quite right in his warning against Napoleon, though his own eyes saw the situation with deep hostility. His soul was steeped in hatred of the Napoleonids. "Napoleon has no moral sense," he said to Baron von Vrints, "and, when one succeeds in bringing it home to him, he naïvely confesses that he did not know

it. The fact is that he looks only to his own interest and pleasure."

The Belgian King's constant appeal to a union of Austria and Prussia, for which he had begun to plead the moment Napoleon rose to power, meant really nothing more than the connection, effected by Bismarck after the war of 1866, of Austria-Hungary with the German Empire, which lasted until the last Great War. Buol himself declared that he was quite convinced that a concentration of the scattered forces of Central Europe would be the best means of frustrating all ambitious plans directed against the peace of the world.<sup>1</sup> But he did not get beyond the theory. He replied with countless phrases to the warnings of King Leopold. It was a work of art to extract the meaning from them, and, even when one had done this, one did not know what to do.

Yet King Leopold persisted in his efforts to bring Austria and Germany together. He recalled that even Frederick William IV had said to him that it would be "an act of stupidity" for Germany if it did not help Austria to retain its Italian provinces. The Imperial State had only to stimulate the nationalist sentiment of public opinion in Germany against France. Certainly, Napoleon had no reason to take pleasure in his Belgian neighbour. King Leopold never lost an opportunity to inflame people against him.

The Belgian King was, however, conscious that he was making no progress with Count Buol. He, therefore, decided to make a fresh trial of his personal influence on the Austrian ruler, although hitherto his relations with the Emperor had been rather of a domestic nature. In regard to affairs their intercourse had been strictly formal. He now wrote to Francis Joseph that it was necessary to consult the sensitiveness of Prussia, because, being the

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Count Buol-Schauenstein to Baron von Vrints, November 18, 1858 (State Archives).



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weakest of the five Great Powers, it was always apprehensive that its position was not sufficiently recognised.<sup>1</sup> The only way to meet the plan of isolating Austria, and then making war successfully on it, was to have an intimate understanding with Prussia. "For," he said, "once it is seen that a war has the risk of starting larger complications, the probability is that the idea will be abandoned."

While this correspondence was taking place, the danger of war between Sardinia, France, and Austria became increasingly acute. The often-quoted words which Napoleon III addressed to the Austrian Ambassador on New Year's Day 1859 expressing regret that his relations with Austria were not so good as they had been, were at once transmitted to Vienna by Baron von Hübner, though at first without any commentary. The Ambassador himself did not at once see the great importance of them, but the other members of the Diplomatic Corps and the Press took them very seriously, and they were then regarded in Austria as very menacing. As a matter of fact, Baron von Hübner was right. Napoleon had not wished to have this ominous meaning read into his words. When he heard the effect, he regretted it, for to speak such things deliberately would be crude and foolish. It is hardly wise to warn an opponent several months in advance.

It was, however, safe to do this in the case of Austria. It, apparently, saw nothing and heard nothing. It seemed quite happy in its isolation, and left others to work for it. On February 3rd King Leopold sent word that he was firmly convinced that Napoleon had decided on war. If it occurred, he said, Austria ought to concentrate all its military forces on the spot, and not make any demonstration against Russia, which would be merely a repetition of the blunder of the Crimean War. In fine, King Leopold

<sup>1</sup> Letter of December 6, 1858 (State Archives).

warned them against the post offices at Aix-la-Chapelle and Cologne, where the French had secret agents.

So far did the King go in his zeal for Austrian interests—and his hatred of Napoleon. "Heaven knows," he wrote to Queen Victoria, "what dance our Emperor *Napoléon troisième de son nom* will lead us. In a few days he will have to make his speech. I fear he is determined on the Italian War."<sup>1</sup>

That was his view of the gospel according to Napoleon III. Naturally, the Emperor himself deeply distrusted King Leopold. In spite of all the friendliness in England, he trusted the Prince Consort just as little as his uncle. He saw everywhere plots of the Coburg family to raise coalitions against him. In the case of King Leopold he was entirely right. If the Belgian King could have done it, he would have raised against Napoleon III some such gigantic coalition as that against Napoleon I.

In England, there was only a limited amount of interest in Italy, but another war on the part of Napoleon might lead to a fresh triumph for him and to consequences that it was not easy to foresee. The Queen, therefore, decided to send Lord Cowley with a manuscript letter to Francis Joseph, in which she offered to mediate between the two Emperors.

There was, however, now, in spite of the isolation, a warlike feeling in Vienna, and the Emperor's reply contained only general observations. Buol could do nothing but make charges against all the Powers. Feeling ran too high in Italy, the revolutionary spirit had made too much progress in Sardinia, Napoleon seemed to be no longer master of his own position and his decisions, and the English Cabinet had no longer sufficient consciousness of authority, although the English nation saw that there was question of annexation and destruction, and was quite ready to support a strong ministry. Even Prussia was

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, III, 403, February 24, 1859.

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not spared; it did not meet all the requirements of its position. Count Buol was content only with himself, apparently. He wanted Sardinia disarmed, and he sent the Archduke Albrecht to Berlin with feeble proposals.<sup>1</sup>

In the circumstances King Leopold found it difficult to do anything for Austria. But he persisted in his efforts, and he now leaned to the familiar solution—a congress. He proposed this to Francis Joseph.<sup>2</sup> It was too late. Indeed, how could Austria venture to trust a congress in which it could hardly count upon the support of a single Power? Moreover, it insisted that the Treaties of 1815 must be taken as the basis of discussion, and that excluded at once any chance of a settlement. The attitude of Austria during the Crimean War, and even Schwartzemberg's bloodless victory at Olmütz, were now to be expiated.

King Leopold was very sceptical about the situation, recognising that France had fully succeeded in isolating Austria. There were, in fact, rumours of a Franco-Russian Alliance; though they were false, for Napoleon's part in the Crimean War had not yet been forgotten in Russia. Meantime the French Emperor and Cavour had come out into the open. Napoleon had at length succeeded in finding a Princess of Royal blood for the young Prince Jerome. It was the outward sign of an understanding with Sardinia. The son of the former King of Westphalia was affianced to the seventeen-year old daughter of Victor Emmanuel.

To crown matters, Austria allowed itself to be drawn into a position that lent it the appearance of being the aggressor, as Cavour had sought. It was with joy that, on April 29th, he heard that the Austrian troops had crossed the Ticino. So the war began. On May 1st,

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Count Buol to King Leopold, April 12, 1859 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Letter of April 15, 1859 (State Archives).

King Leopold wrote to Francis Joseph, offering to do anything in his power to secure victory for Austria. It had been in grave anxiety in 1848-9, yet had mastered the situation with its splendid army. Then, it is true, it had had the aid of Russia; and there was no help from Russia now. Then, moreover, it had had a Radetzky in command; and there was now no Radetzky amongst its young Generals.

King Leopold seems to have had a presentiment that on this occasion the generalship would be at fault, and he sent lengthy strategical advice to the Austrian Emperor:

The chief thing is to be the stronger at the decisive point. Victory there means victory everywhere. Hence detachments of troops must be very restricted. Many a time bodies of men which have been sent to less important positions would have given the victory in the main battle if they had been kept there. The main object must be to wear down the enemy's forces. This is often not done sufficiently, yet the destruction of the enemy's fighting forces is the main thing. Unity of command will also, in case of inferior ability, give better results than a divided command. With the exception of the necessary reserves, all the troops intended for the enterprise must be used at once. The position must be heavily bombarded with artillery; feints must be made against the strongest part of the position, but, wherever possible, the rear of the position must be reached by flanking movements.<sup>1</sup>

The King trusted that, as war is a duel, all the rules for the cessation of it would be observed. But his golden counsels made little impression in Austria. They were set aside with a laugh at Vienna. Francis Joseph, it is true, answered that he hoped soon to show, by results, how thoroughly his ideas coincided with those of the Belgian King; but he put at the head of the Austrian Army a man, Count Gyulay, who had little but his nobility and his connection with the Court to entitle him to the position. Instead of attacking the Sardinians before the French could join them, then hurrying over the Alps

<sup>1</sup> Manuscript memorandum, May 1, 1859.



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with all his forces to meet the French, he hesitated until they were united. Moreover, he weakened his force by sending part of it to fight the reconnaissance battle of Montebello. The whole world was astonished at his strategy.

King Leopold was indignant. He deplored the loss of the opportunity of attacking the Allies before they united, and said that the battle of Montebello was "too little and too much"; he meant that this aimless battle had only stimulated the thirst for glory of the French. From Russia, he thought, there was nothing to be feared, and, therefore, Austria ought not to weaken itself by defensive measures in Galicia. Russia would, at the most, exert upon Austria the same pressure as Austria had brought upon Russia during the Eastern crisis.<sup>1</sup>

He was quite right, but they would not listen to him. All contemporaries were disgusted at the conduct of the Austrian Government and commander. Even Queen Victoria wrote to her uncle that she could not understand "what the Austrians were really doing." They delayed and let the French grow stronger and better prepared. "It is," she wrote to King Leopold, "trying and difficult to understand them or do anything for them."<sup>2</sup> It was clear that she had very largely lost her enthusiasm for Napoleon III. She was beginning to be anxious about the further extension of his power.

By the end of May, even Vienna had had enough of the policy of Count Buol. He resigned, and was succeeded by Count Rechenberg-Rothenlöwen. This man in turn had not the ability to grasp the military situation, and he advised the Emperor personally to visit the theatre of war. The Austrian command in the battle of Magenta (June 4th) was not a shade better. There was no unity of command, no instructions to divisional com-

<sup>1</sup> Baron von Vrints to Count Rechberg, May 31, 1859 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Letter to King Leopold, May 9, 1859 (State Archives).

manders, and the bravery of the troops could not outweigh this.

The downfall of Austria gave King Leopold very deep concern. If France recovered the position which the Peace of Lunéville had once given it, it was all up with the liberty of Europe. Prussian and German help alone could now avail, and King Leopold did not hesitate to try to bring in Prussia against Napoleon. In a conversation with the Prussian Ambassador on June 17th he insisted that Prussia ought at once to put its Army on a war-footing and concentrate it on the Rhine, in order to give emphasis to the demands it would make in Paris. He himself would write to urge the Prussian Prince to communicate to Paris that the Etschtal, the gate of the Tyrol, was the defensive line of Germany, and Austria would have German support there. If they were not to have 1806 over again, they must concentrate 150,000 men on the Rhine rather than bow down to "the Lord" (Napoleon).

He did not spare Count Gyulay in his criticisms. On the other hand, he was reassuring about the attitude of Russia, saying that he knew from his nephew in England that the attitude of the Russian Cabinet toward Germany and the refusal of the mission extraordinary of the former Prussian military attaché, Count Münster, which was intended for a discussion of the situation and the submitting of various proposals on the part of Prussia, were entirely due to Bismarck's conduct. Bismarck had given in Petrograd the advice to concentrate a Russian Army on the Prussian frontier in order to prevent Prussia from entering the war on the side of Austria, as the Prince Regent and many others wished.<sup>1</sup>

From Petrograd, where he had been Prussian Ambassador, Bismarck had persistently urged Berlin not to be drawn into the war. He had shown his line

<sup>1</sup> Baron von Vrints to Count Rechberg, June 17, 1859 (State Archives).

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of thought in the concluding sentence of his report from Petrograd of May 4, 1859 :

We must refrain from taking part in the war except in so far as we can, or wish to, use such share profitably in improving our Federal relations [to the rest of Germany]. Moreover, we have just as little interest in a victory of Austria over France as in an acquisition of territory by France. For the moment a localisation of the war, with the guarantee of Russia and, if possible, England, against any infringement of German territory by France, would be a fortunate issue of Prussian policy.<sup>1</sup>

While, therefore, King Leopold was right in regarding Bismarck as the man who thwarted their efforts to bring Prussia into the war, he and the Prince Consort were certainly in error in saying that Bismarck had gone so far as to press Russia to move an army against his own country in order to compel it to follow his policy. That would be rather too drastic and dangerous a way of enforcing his views upon his country.

Meantime the war in Italy dragged on. On June 24th the battle of Solferino was fought, and, in spite of the presence of the young Emperor, it had gone badly for Austria. Then something happened which was not in the least expected either by King Leopold or anybody else. On July 8, 1859, Napoleon III and Francis Joseph suddenly concluded an armistice at Villafranca. Sardinia was forced to lay down its arms, whether it would or no.

The situation in Germany had become threatening for both Emperors. The Prussian Prince Regent and the majority of his people seemed determined to listen no longer to the counsels of Bismarck, but to take the field against Napoleon. Prussia mobilised six of its army corps and proposed to take command of the corps raised by the other States. Napoleon found himself facing the prospect of having to fight a strong German Army on

<sup>1</sup> L. Raschdau, *Die politischen Berichte des Fürsten Bismarck aus Petersburg und Paris 1859-62*, vol. I, p. 64 (1920).

the Rhine; while Francis Joseph feared that Prussia might, by a popular war against the Frenchman, win a position in Germany that would be dangerous to that of Austria. The latter had, in fact, suffered severely on account of the recent reverses. The interests of the two Emperors were once more parallel.

That was the real reason. Officially, of course, it was announced that the two Emperors merely wished "to avoid any further bloodshed." Napoleon sought to get a little Legitimist credit for himself out of the matter. He told the Austrian Ambassador that he had concluded peace because he did not want to have *à ses trousses* the revolution with Kossuth and Klapka or to be taken for "the leader of the *canaille* of Europe." He pointed out that Austria might recoup itself for the loss of Lombardy and its military expenditure by adventures in the East: "The very name Austria," he said, "seems to imply a predestination of the country to stand in the East."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the French Emperor, who got Savoy and Nice for his own country, would conciliate his enemy; he might presently need Austria against Prussia. In spite, however, of his love of peace, King Leopold was not wholly pleased with the new triumph of Napoleon. His birthday letter to Francis Joseph, on August 14th, contained merely generalities. Francis Joseph replied at greater length. He spoke of his "painful experience" at Villafranca, and excused his surrender on the ground of the internal condition of his Empire. To that, he said, he must again devote himself, in order to put an end to the "chaotic internal state of Italy."<sup>2</sup> In the first draft of his letter were the words: "Your Majesty says nothing about the Villafranca terms, but I think you would not have advised me to reject them." They were struck out, as it was

<sup>1</sup> Prince Metternich to Count Rechberg, September 5, 1859 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> Letter to King Leopold, August 23, 1859 (State Archives).



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realised that King Leopold would certainly not approve of this bowing to the will of Napoleon.

The situation was unalterable, and King Leopold turned to consider the consequences. He must now not merely conceal his hostility to Napoleon, but must get on better terms with him. The Prussian Prince Regent, who had been completely disarmed by the action of Austria, had also to change his course. King Leopold met him at Ostend at the end of August, on returning from a visit to Queen Victoria. He would now be the mediator between Prussia and France. In the middle of September he visited the French Emperor at Biarritz.

To Austria the King sent word that he had done everything he could in its interest, and that no Italian troops were to beset the fortresses on the Mincio. Metternich, the new Austrian Ambassador at Paris, was, as a matter of fact, strongly supported by King Leopold. The King had never been cordial with his predecessor, Baron von Hübner, and he had thrown upon him a good deal of the blame for the rupture. The King had, in fact, gone so far as to say that, if Metternich had been at Paris on January 1859, Napoleon would scarcely have made his ominous remarks on that day, and there might have been no war.<sup>1</sup>

In regard to German affairs the King now returned to his old conciliatory tone. Napoleon treated him, externally, with the greatest respect, but he was extremely cautious in the political sphere. He preferred to discuss the military experiences of the war, and said things that would be agreeable to Austria, knowing that everything would at once be reported to it ; for Napoleon wanted to conciliate Francis Joseph.

Amongst other things, the French Emperor told him that, when the French Army was advancing toward the

<sup>1</sup> Baron von Vrints to Count Rechberg, November 28, 1859 (State Archives).

Ticino, he was very much afraid that a powerful attack of the Austrians might sweep the French into Lago Maggiore (!); and that if the Austrians had renewed the fight after the battle of Magenta, they would have robbed him of victory. At Solferino, again, he had had only one brigade of the guard in reserve, and he would certainly have been defeated if, according to their earlier custom, the Austrians had had a reserve corps to strengthen their centre, and had made a final effort; especially as they had the advantage on the wings, and their right wing had already defeated the Sardinians.

Napoleon accused the Sardinians of always trying to keep at a distance, and did not conceal that he thought his ally ungrateful: a sentiment fully shared by the Emperor's staff, and expressed in very strong terms. These were the things which Napoleon wanted to have conveyed to Austria. They had little relation to his real ideas, except on the last point, the differences with the Sardinians, in which there was a good deal of truth.

For Count Cavour the war was over too soon. Venice remained under Austria, and Cavour had still to pay the price in the West. When Baron von Vrints asked King Leopold if he thought that Napoleon would be loyal to his engagements at Villafranca, he replied that he believed the Emperor wished to do so, but only in so far as circumstances allowed him, as he would always be reluctant to disappoint the Italians.

To show his good-will, and in recognition of Sardinia's well-paid share in the Crimean War, King Leopold raised the question of Belgium taking part in the expedition to Annam and Tongking, where Napoleon had taken advantage of a persecution of Christians to spread his dominion. It is possible that Napoleon laughed in his sleeve at this vague idea. Naturally, it did not take place.

As far as the public was concerned, the relations of the

two monarchs seemed to be cordial once more, and there was great rejoicing in Brussels. In reality, they had not come a single step nearer to each other. The King hoped that the Emperor would injure himself by giving Constitutional Government to the Italians. He thought the French would say: "Are we less fit than the Italians to have liberty?" "This may become more dangerous," the King wrote to Queen Victoria, "as things move on; not that I should regret it. We can never have any security as long as France remains without a Constitutional Government."<sup>1</sup>

He feared also that Russia and France might reach an *entente*. This was said to be the aim of the Russian Chancellor, Gortschakoff, and King Leopold remarked that it would be mischievous.

These strenuous exertions and journeys had affected the splendid health which the King had hitherto enjoyed. At the end of November he was down with a violent dysentery, which he ascribed to "a stupid chill." His frame was weakened, and he was beginning to feel his seventy years. He recovered slowly.

Yet he did not forsake international politics, although he was no longer so successful in that field. Napoleon had incorporated Savoy and Nice in March (1860). It was now to be feared that he might turn his attention to the North. England, it is true, warned him. Belgium was not Savoy, and Lord Russell let it be understood that, if a question arose in which France was wrong, or was led away by the *esprit d'empîement*, England would contract an alliance with the other Powers to check it. It was a clear expression of England's consistent policy. British diplomacy, measured by its success, is the first in the world. England has always sent abroad, in its service, the ablest men, not the men with the highest titles.

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, III, 493, February 3, 1860.

Still, the issue of the war of 1859 was a complete success for Napoleon. Austria was beaten. King Leopold saw all his wishes wrecked, and the hated Emperor triumphant everywhere. As before, his ulterior designs gave King Leopold great anxiety. He lived to see all the triumphs of his enemy, not his later defeats. But France was becoming too powerful for England, and the King noted this with some satisfaction. He said once to the Duc de Duchâtel: "In the next war the Emperor Napoleon must be quadruply in the right if his enemy is not to count upon the support of England. Public opinion there is increasingly critical about him."<sup>1</sup> The prophecy was false. England remained neutral in the war of 1870-1, but only after each of the belligerents had pledged itself to respect the neutrality of Belgium, and agreed that England should take action at once against either Power that violated it.

There was a wide distrust of Napoleon in Belgium, which was, of course, partly due to the not wholly unknown attitude of the monarch. Scurrilous poems on the Emperor circulated in Brussels.<sup>2</sup> King Leopold never ceased to discover new securities against the dangers that threatened him from the South. He noted with satisfaction that there seemed to be a momentary *rapprochement* between England and Russia, and said that he was convinced that only the three Northern Powers in alliance with Russia could curb Napoleon's ambition; and that

<sup>1</sup> Count Coudenhove to Count Rechberg, July 12, 1860 (State Archives).

<sup>2</sup> "Napoleon's Lord's Prayer" may be quoted as a sample:

Our Father, which art in Fontainebleau,  
Thy name is no longer hallowed in England.  
Thy kingdom is not yet large enough.  
Thy will is no longer done in St. Petersburg.  
Give us our bread, that runs short on account of thy commercial treaties  
and the armistice of business.  
Forgive our enemy in Baden [where he met the Prussian Prince], and  
not the Ministers who sent thee in a bad mood to discuss with him.  
Yield not to all temptations of thy friend Cavour,  
But deliver us from friend Jacobin and from the domination of thy sabre.  
Amen.



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the Emperor, in view of his origin, would plant revolution wherever he could to prevent it from breaking out in his own country. Hence he was pleased to hear that the Emperor Francis Joseph was to meet the Prussian Prince Regent. He urged all the German Princes he could reach to draw nearer to Austria. In these efforts he had now found a strong critic in the new Austrian Ambassador at Brussels, Baron von Hügel. The latter wrote to Count Rechberg, in a long letter, that the King left inner politics to his Ministers while he devoted himself to international matters. He kept to his palace at Laeken, and put no obstacle in the way of the development of Belgium. This suited the Belgians, who had "a frenetic zeal for accumulating wealth," and so the King was greatly praised, and thought himself a model ruler.

These remarks are true only of the latter part of King Leopold's reign, when the internal development had taken the line he wished. In earlier years he had interfered much, and vigorously; always, however, in harmony with the wish of his people, which a diplomatist of Metternich's school could not understand.

His favourite sphere, however, was international politics. Baron von Hügel was generally of opinion that he wished to see France and England in alliance, as the best guarantee for the independence of Belgium. Failing this he was supposed to want an alliance of the German sovereigns. The Ambassador added that in private conversation the King spoke freely about Napoleon, but was very cautious on other occasions.

This was not far from the truth. The King's attitude toward internal affairs was very shrewd. If he had opposed the peaceful development of the country, it is very doubtful if Belgium would be a kingdom to-day. Anarchy, however, he always sternly suppressed. His difficult position in a country whose fate was jealously watched by all observers necessarily made him careful

to avoid public enemies, and to do everything possible for its security. Baron von Hügel asked too much in demanding angelic unselfishness in a man who was at the time the first statesman of his country. "At the present moment," he said, "the Belgians all boast of their independence and freedom. But it is the egoism of national prosperity and the comfort of all classes that lie at the root of this patriotism." That is an unconscious recognition of the justice of the King's policy in the interest of his people. The personal happiness, the moral and economic welfare, of all citizens without distinction must be the first concern of all good government and of every conscientious ruler.

But Napoleon's continuous advance upon the lines he was following might be a terrible menace to the State which King Leopold had so well built up by his thirty years of labour. There was, therefore, no limit to the King's hostility to him. He never ceased to rouse people against Napoleon. Whenever the reports of the Belgian Ambassador at Paris were alarming, they were sent at once to England, Austria and Prussia. For instance, at the beginning of February (1861), the Ambassador sent word of a new plan of Napoleon's directed against Prussia: a plan to recover the "natural frontiers" of France on the Rhine.

Napoleon, who knew well that in Germany and everywhere else it was assumed that he wanted to regain the left bank of the Rhine at any cost, was always trying to learn the feeling of the Germans. He inquired particularly of private individuals, as he considered that the eyes of diplomatists were dazed by the glamour of the world in which they lived. When Liszt once came to receive the cross of the Legion of Honour from him, the Emperor remarked that he had made an exception in his favour. Rossini and he were the only foreigners who were Commanders. Suddenly he asked Liszt:

"What is the feeling of the German Princes about me?"

"Very unfriendly to Your Majesty," said Liszt.

"And the people?"

"Hostile also," said the musician.

"I can't understand it," the Emperor exclaimed. "It is ungrateful. They must see what I have done for the Italian people, and I would do the same for the Germans. They may rely on that. Why are they hostile?"

"Does Your Majesty wish me to speak candidly?" Liszt asked. "Very well. It is because they are convinced that you want the Rhine frontier."

The Emperor did not reply. On another occasion Liszt was summoned to the Emperor's presence. Napoleon sat at the piano, and played some fine pieces which he claimed to have composed; though Liszt ascribed them to Queen Hortense. Then Napoleon asked:

"Has Prince Metternich a real ability for music? You often see him."

"Certainly he has."

"Stay in Paris. I will find you a good home here, and see to your future. Why do you persist in staying at Weimar?"

"I am very comfortable there, Your Majesty. The Grand Duke is very kind to me. I have had a very nice letter from him to-day. I am quite content with the life I lead in Weimar."

"But all these German Princes will soon disappear (*tout cela dècampera bientôt*)," said the Emperor.

"Then I will come back," said Liszt.

The Emperor laughed, then suddenly grew serious, and went on:

"Monsieur Liszt, I am tired. I feel as if I were a hundred years old. This never-ending work is killing me. When you have done with the people, you have to begin with

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the Princes. When you have done with them, you begin again with the people.”<sup>1</sup>

Napoleon's remarks agreed with what King Leopold heard about the frame of mind of his neighbour. For a time the Emperor found affairs of State a terrible burden. Napoleon I had displayed more energy and love of work the more was asked of him, but his nephew was of softer stuff.

But the French Emperor was not King Leopold's only anxiety. The year 1861 was one of deep mourning for the Coburg family. In March, the Duchess of Kent, his sister, died. The Queen's distress was heartrending over the loss of her mother. She had, she told her uncle, never before stood beside a corpse. She was destined soon to stand by the body of one who was even dearer to her.

In Portugal, King Pedro V, who had once been intended for King Leopold's daughter, and one of his brothers had died in quick succession. Then came the hardest blow. The Prince Consort, who had been ailing for some time, had taken to bed in the later days of November. The physicians did not at first realise the gravity of his illness, and the Queen suspected no danger. She was the more severely stricken when he died on December 14th. She gave expression to her pain in a moving letter to King Leopold, whom, in that mournful hour, she called her “only, dearest, most loving father,” while she called herself “a broken and downcast widow.” The King was himself profoundly afflicted. He had, as far as it was his nature to do so, really loved his nephew, and was proud to have had a share in his career.

Politically, also it was a severe blow to him. The expulsion of the Orléans family had left him without support in France, and now in one year he had lost his

<sup>1</sup> Report made by Baron von Hügel, who heard the facts from Liszt, to Count Rechberg, June 17, 1861 (State Archives).



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sister and nephew, the mother and the spouse of the Queen of England. However, grateful the Queen might be, this was bound to affect seriously the Belgian King's influence in England.

He saw in the event a sort of divergence of the different lines of the Coburg family. The continental Coburgs would no longer find it easy to lend a hand to the insular Coburgs. Queen Victoria had a severe nervous crisis, and her uncle went to support her; but he in turn fell ill at Windsor. One support gave way after another. The edifice of Coburg power began to totter.

## *Chapter XIV*

### *LAST DAYS*

**T**HE STATE of King Leopold's health had become very unsatisfactory. When, at the beginning of 1862, he complied with his niece's invitation to England, he had a very painful, severe, and obstinate attack of stone. He was anxious that the English should not understand how much his health was shaken, and he regretted that the new attack had come during this visit. He therefore ascribed all the trouble to the English climate, to conceal the deeper-lying malady.

It meant also that he saw little of the Queen. During his six weeks' stay he saw her at the most five or six times, and was at table with her only once. All sorts of rumours were floated in explanation of this, as the public knew nothing about his illness.

Baron von Hügel told, from Brussels, an adventurous story which he had heard from servants. According to this, Queen Victoria, when the Prince Consort died, entered his room with a trusted chamber-maid, a daughter of King Leopold's first chamberlain, Andrews, and opened all the drawers and desks containing the Prince's papers. For several days she was supposed to "have these read" to her—as if anybody would have a third person present on such an occasion. Amongst other things she found the correspondence of King Leopold with the Prince Consort since his marriage. Twice a week, with great regularity, couriers had conveyed letters from one to the

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other. The story ran that in these letters the Queen found suggestions which deeply hurt her, and it was this which accounted for her coldness to her uncle. When the King fell ill, the Queen asked his chamberlain to send her a telegram in code every day about his health. This was supposed to mean that she wanted to visit King Leopold in his last moments in order to get possession of the letters which the Prince Consort had written to him.

There was, it is true, some reason to fear an indiscretion. For some years the King's household had included a certain Mme Meyer von Eppinghoven. At first she was generally regarded as his mistress ; then, as he grew older, as a self-sacrificing, very tactful, and tender-hearted friend. When the King was ill in England in February 1861, she was very devoted to him and unceasing in her attentions.

In the next few months his illness became much worse. It is said that during this period he underwent no less than twenty operations. At last he grew impatient, and angrily observed that he could only think that the physicians were "making money" by their repeated operations. When, for some time, his illness gave rise to grave concern, he ordered Mme Meyer to go to Wiesbaden, as he feared that, if he died, she would experience some unpleasantness from his family or the public. With many protests she departed ; but, as his health improved, he summoned her once more to Laeken. She was the only person he received during his illness. Even the members of his family saw very little of him, and often did not see him at all for weeks.

Strangers he would not suffer to approach him. On one occasion only, when he felt better, he made an exception. On July 26th of that year he sent for Count Conway, who had long sought an audience. The King dressed elaborately. He was shaved, had his eyebrows darkened, and put on the wig which he had now worn

about ten years. His face was then, Baron von Hügel reported, "painted in all the colours of health and youth." He thus received the Count, and told him that he felt remarkably well; though the physician had shortly before said that the King had passed a terrible night, and had twice fainted with the pain.<sup>1</sup>

This report is tinged with malice, as are all Baron von Hügel's accounts of the personality of the King. He was anything but friendly to the monarch to whom he was accredited. His words must, therefore, be taken with reserve, but they are substantially true. That was King Leopold's way. He would at any cost conceal weakness, the decay of his powers, from the world. He still had an idea of doing great things, and could not bear to think of people regarding him as a dying man.

That was, however, the general impression. It was said even by the Archduke Albrecht, who saw him at the end of August (1862), when he had much improved. He reported home that he had found the King in an extraordinarily low condition, physically and morally, although Leopold had made the utmost efforts to conceal his weakness, partly by the arts of his toilet. The Prince added that the King had discussed politics with him, although he had the greatest difficulty in standing erect, and his remarks were of no value whatever.

Soon afterwards, as the King made remarkable progress in spite of all expectations, Queen Victoria came to visit her uncle. International politics had little or nothing to do with this. She merely spoke a little about English State affairs in order to satisfy him. He had long ceased to have any influence on them. He had done very little even in the later years of the Prince Consort. Palmerston was all-powerful in England; and that meant the complete cessation of any direct influence on the part of King Leopold.

<sup>1</sup> Baron von Hügel to Count Reehberg, July 28, 1862 (State Archives).



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The King's strong constitution prevailed over the malady, and by the end of September he could be described as fully restored. Hardly had he recovered his strength when he felt a revival of his political energies. More or less elbowed out of France by Napoleon, of England by Palmerston, and of Prussia by Bismarck, he, as usual, turned his attention to the advancement of members of his family. He had a profound and unshakable conviction that the Coburgs were destined to rule. Whenever he could, he created a position in the world for one of them. There was, for instance, his daughter, the Archduchess Charlotte. Her husband, Ferdinand Max was an able, amiable, and courteous Prince, brother of the Emperor, apparently created to be ruler of a great nation; and his wife was very assiduous in helping him.

There was now a fresh opportunity. In 1861, Napoleon had, in conjunction with Spain and England, dipped into the Mexican imbroglio. The other two States had soon withdrawn, when they saw the equivocal nature of the enterprise. England, in fact, saw that it would arouse feeling in North America if it intervened in Mexico. But Napoleon felt it inconsistent with his honour and his military glory to abandon any enterprise, and a strong French force was dispatched to Mexico. In the end it was felt that the country, rent by parties, would be best consulted by providing it with an hereditary monarchy.

It had to be a Catholic Prince, and Napoleon was at the time still eager to conciliate Austria on account of 1859. The Archduke Ferdinand Max had often expressed his friendliness for, even admiration of, the French Emperor, and had urged his brother at Vienna to meet him. In July 1861 the Archduke was considering whether he might eventually come to occupy the very unstable throne. He had laid down several important conditions, but had let it be known that, in certain circumstances, he was ready to consider the matter. He applied to his Belgian

father-in-law for advice. He was known to be willing, but was pledged to nothing. King Leopold's opinion was especially interesting as, at the time of the Mexican Revolution, when the country broke away from Spain, he had himself been thought of by many Mexicans as a possible monarch. They had applied to Canning, who feared that it would look like too interested an act on the part of England, and for this and other reasons, the project had fallen through.

The King regarded the plan as very difficult, particularly as England—much against its interest, the King said—showed so little enthusiasm about it. The first thing, he said, was to ascertain what the Mexicans themselves wanted, and so Ferdinand Max had better not bind himself, but need not withdraw. They would then see. This advice was quite in accord with the Archduke's ideas, and he now began to follow up the matter with great energy. On December 31, 1861, he had a long conversation with Francis Joseph at Venice, and they agreed as to the conditions under which the Emperor would consent to his occupying the Mexican Throne. The Archduke then begged his father-in-law to use his influence in England, especially with the Queen, to get the Government and nation to give material support to the plan. King Leopold was also to work for a loan on the part of England, and, in case of need, permit the enlisting of a corps of volunteers for Mexico in Belgium.

He stayed with the Queen at Osborne in January 1862, but he had no good news to report about the attitude of England. The most one could hope for was consent and moral support. It was impossible to rely upon material guarantees or a loan. The Archduke had over-estimated the King's influence. With advancing age and ill-health he had become weaker and weaker, as his experience here showed. The English, moreover, could not fail to notice

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that he was not impartial, as it was a question of his own daughter.

Napoleon the King again distrusted. He was not clear about the Emperor's real motives, and he tried to ascertain them. Yet, in spite of what he had learned in England, he was much attracted by the proud prospect of a Throne for his daughter. He had no longer the cool judgment of former days, as it would certainly have restrained him from accepting for his son-in-law a dangerous, no matter how specious, gift from the hand of his enemy. He threw himself into the matter. He recommended prudence, and good advice, but he never spoke decisively ; though he knew that England was very sceptical, and he distrusted the French.

In 1862, the Mexican affair made slow progress. The Civil War in the United States occupied men's minds. King Leopold was a partisan of the South, and he tried to help the Southerners in England and France. He wanted to induce France, England and Russia to offer their services as mediators. If this was declined, as was to be expected, it would justify them in recognising the Southern States. His views put him in a serious dilemma. At the time he was to be appointed arbitrator in a dispute between Peru and the United States, and it would be necessary to recognise as a belligerent Power one of the parties to the Civil War. This, of course, could not be done in the case of the rebellious Southern States ; and it would be against his own views, and would strengthen the case of the Northern States, if he recognised them alone.

He tried to convince Napoleon III that it was important for his Mexican enterprise to recognise the Southern States. There again, however, he had to appreciate the decay of his influence. Neither in England nor France could he get any support for the South.

Meantime the Archduke was pressing earnestly for his intervention and persuasion in England. The Prince

wanted to be quite clear about his position as regards one of the most decisive factors. He was rather less optimistic and better informed, but he hoped for an improvement. Moreover, both the King and the Archduke had been misled as to the situation in Mexico by the reports of the Belgian Envoy, Kint von Roodenbeck. He was very zealous for monarchy, and he regarded the situation through coloured spectacles. He did much to confuse the mind of the sceptical and hesitating King, in spite of all his ambition, and to confirm the Archduke in his wishes. King Leopold thought that Napoleon would have to occupy and control the whole country, or nothing could be done. This, however, was inconsistent with the condition on which the King insisted, that Mexico should be free to express its own wishes. That was one of the fundamental errors of the whole enterprise. *Pronunciamentos* which had been extorted by French bayonets were taken at their face value.

In July 1863, the Archduchess Charlotte again besought her father to induce England to give support to the French plans in Mexico. In view, however, of the gradual worsening of the position of the Southern States, this was useless. King Leopold, indeed, now saw new and formidable difficulties for the proposed monarchy, yet he could not entirely give up the idea of a Crown for his daughter. She, on her side, was enthusiastic for the plan. Unhappily, she had had no children, and she would at least secure a great sphere of action for her husband—and herself. It seemed to her that her father was too tepid. About the middle of September (1863), therefore, she decided to see him and make him more vigorous.

She succeeded beyond her expectations. Although England would give neither guarantees nor material aid, and promised only recognition and (so the King said) a cruiser to take Ferdinand Max to his kingdom, Leopold



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was completely won over by his daughter. He recommended an "elastic" Constitution, as ministers were always tending to emancipate themselves from their sovereign, went into the smallest details of the future Government, and promised to try again in England. But he repeatedly pointed out that the Archduke in accepting would render a great service to Napoleon, who was so deeply involved in Mexico, and so he must demand of him all possible guarantees—money, the retention of the French troops, etc.—and in writing. He knew from his own experience that these things could be got more easily before accepting than afterwards.

England, however, was unwilling, and preferred to offer the Archduke the Crown of Greece, which the Bavarian Otto had just forfeited. King Leopold had spoken to Palmerston about this before the Mexican project was started, and had told him that the Archduke was the fittest person for it. When Queen Victoria now asked him to put the matter to his son-in-law, he felt that he must give up the idea of Mexico and do so. But the Archduke had gone so far with the Mexican plan that it was difficult to withdraw; nor did he like the idea of the Greek Throne, which had already been refused by several Princes.

The matter had to be decided in the spring of 1864. The Archduke accepted the Mexican Crown, although some of his conditions had either wholly or partially been left unfulfilled. He and his wife set out for the distant country, where so many difficulties and struggles awaited them. King Leopold was not destined to see the end of the adventure. It was better; for he would have suffered fearfully to see his son-in-law shot and his daughter, after fruitless appeals for aid for her husband, driven into insanity. It would have given a terrible impulse to his undying hatred of Napoleon.

The French Emperor gave no sympathy or aid to the

children of his bitter enemy. It was a sort of involuntary revenge upon the King, though he was then in his grave. The enterprise had been precarious from the start. No American would have permanently tolerated a new European Empire within the sphere of the Monroe Doctrine. The speculation on the secession of the Southern States was a failure, and the drama ended in tragedy.

At the time the raising of his son-in-law to the height of a Throne was a great joy to the ageing monarch. And in 1864 there was a fresh opportunity to find a Throne for a Coburger. Otto, the Bavarian, had been driven out of Athens by a military revolution in October 1862, and there was question of finding a candidate who would be acceptable to England ; though he must not be an Englishman. Greece was, of course, King Leopold's first love. Once he had been willing to go there himself, and he now proposed to find another Coburger for the post. In this his wish coincided with that of the British Government. Uncle and niece could once more co-operate in a political enterprise, and the Queen could help to promote the fortune of the family of her beloved dead. When Ferdinand Max declined, the Coburger Louis of Portugal was proposed, then the reigning Duke Ernest II of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha.

The latter had already accepted, when difficulties, with which Bismarck was not unconnected, arose. The candidature of the Coburger broke down, in spite of the wishes of Queen Victoria. King Leopold was in no condition to use his energy and connections adequately, and Palmerston preferred Prince Christian of Glücksburg, brother of the Princess of Wales. Fate, apparently, did not want a Coburger on the Throne of Greece. He had failed, but the King had at all events used his last vitality, in spite of increasing suffering, for the advancement of his House.

He also followed with interest the development in Germany, though he was no longer able to exert any

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influence on it. Bismarck was at the head of the Prussian Government, since September 23, 1863. There was no room for the counsels of foreigners, even of a foreign King who was a member of a German princely House. An external indication of this was the difference, in June 1863, between William I of Prussia and the Crown Prince.

On Bismarck's advice there were issued what were called the "press ordinances," which fettered the opposition papers. Properly speaking, a law ought to have been passed, instead of merely issuing a Cabinet order. The Crown Prince sided with those who said that it was a breach of the Constitution, and he sufficiently indicated his view in a public speech to the Mayor of Dantzic. This brought him into sharp conflict with his father, who approved Bismarck's conduct; and Bismarck blamed the Crown Prince's wife, the Princess Victoria, for the outbreak.

Queen Augusta of Prussia, who was then on a visit to England, attempted to mediate, with the aid of King Leopold and Queen Victoria. Baron von Hügel made use of the report on these proceedings to attack Bismarck, who was "to blame for everything," and whose "dangerous advice" had been bitterly deplored by the Prussian Queen.<sup>1</sup> According to the Baron, Queen Augusta had wanted King Leopold to join her in her effort at reconciliation, and had asked him to write personally to King William. But the Belgian King had declined, as is quite probable. Twice before, notably in the Russo-Prussian negotiations, he had made suggestions to Berlin which had been very badly received.

It is not difficult to see in this the hand of Bismarck, who watched jealously to prevent any foreign influence at the Prussian Court. King Leopold was very bitter against the Prussian statesman. "The choice of Herr Bismarck is very unfortunate," he wrote to his son-in-law.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Count Rechberg, June 20, 1863 (State Archives).

"Years ago I knew him as a great friend of Austria, but he is now its worst enemy. Where the good King thinks he is drifting to is not very clear." The son-in-law replied calling Bismarck "the German would-be Cavour." King Leopold had decided never again to interfere in the affairs of the Prussian or English Courts, though the general situation in Europe was not without danger. He was quite convinced that Prussia would suffer for his aloofness, for he thought that war in Europe was by no means impossible. "Napoleon," he said, "is as much an enemy of King William as of me, and I sincerely hope that Bismarck will not end by embroiling Prussia with England."

King Leopold's dislike of Bismarck was reciprocated. The Prussian very nearly met him, with his sovereign, at Ostend in September 1863, but he suddenly changed his plans and avoided the visit. It is amusing to read Hügel's commentary on the matter.<sup>1</sup> He says:

It is said that in that case Bismarck would have had to ask an audience, and he dreaded a conversation which could not have been very agreeable to him, as the theme of it was bound to be an almost complete condemnation of the home and foreign policy which the Minister had inaugurated *with so little success*.

Bismarck's dislike of the Coburg family, his malicious description of it as "the stud farm of Europe," and his opposition to the marriage of the Crown Prince to Princess Victoria, are well known. He considered, moreover, that Belgium was to play the part of bait to secure Napoleon's neutrality when it came to a struggle between Prussia and Austria for supremacy. And he had little respect for the aged King, who had reports from all sides on Bismarck's unscrupulous attitude in everything that concerned Belgium.

The King was, therefore, indignant when he heard that, in December 1864, in conversation with M. Drouyn

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Count Rechberg, September 18, 1863 (State Archives).



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de Lhuys, Bismarck had said that he could not understand why Napoleon was always looking to Prussia for something which he had at his own frontiers. It would be much simpler to annex Belgium. England would make a row, he said, but would never go to war about it ! It would have been a good thing for Bismarck if he could have drawn Napoleon into a Belgian adventure. He knew quite well that it would have brought England upon him. That would have given sufficient occupation to the two Western Powers, and the Prussian Minister would have been free to deal with Austria.

In the question of Schleswig-Holstein, again, which was the talk of Europe that year, King Leopold would have liked to intervene, but he could scarcely get a hearing. Baron von Hügel says that he had already lost all influence in international politics. This was an exaggeration, for King Leopold's wide connections were still of some service. But it was no longer the old situation. The King had never completely recovered his health, though, thinking that he had done so, he had resumed almost all his old habits.

Hunting and travel alternated with affairs of State. He met Napoleon at Vichy, and, to prove the fine state of his health, he spared himself so little that soon afterwards, in November 1864, he had a relapse. Yet, when Baron von Hügel, who had long been without an audience in consequence of this, asked the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs whether there was anything new in international politics, he had proof that the King was not yet out of it. The Minister replied in astonishment : " No, Baron, you know very well that there is no politics in our Ministry. That is entirely the King's private domain. As a rule, we know less than other people." " It is a fact," the Baron reported to Vienna, " that the Ministers are not always aware of the King's negotiations with foreign Powers."

Now, however, the King had to leave business to others for a time. His malady was again upon him, and he was much tormented and weakened by diarrhœa. During the long hours when he lay abed, and the physician had forbidden him the pleasure of reading, or even being read to, the great scenes of his career passed before his eyes. Behind him were sixty years of rich experience and assiduous activity.

Belgium had made unprecedented progress. The country was thickly populated. Industry was a hundred-fold more intense than in 1830. The wealth of the population grew steadily. The State had a position out of all proportion to its size. Its railways were better developed than those of any other country.

At the age of fifteen the young Coburg Prince, who was the author of this prosperity, had first met the great ones of the world in the Russian headquarters, before Austerlitz. His tall and slender frame, his dark eyes, his finely moulded features, which spoke of placid movement and noble birth, had been his credentials. Other Princes had had the same qualities, but they had not risen as he had done. It was Leopold's ambition and his indefatigable zeal for work that had enabled him to do great things.

Not endowed by nature with strong passions, he had been able to keep his feeling for women in subordination. He had married the heiress to the English Throne from ambition, and for the same motive, and political considerations, he had married the daughter of Louis Philippe.

In the same spirit he had arranged the many marriages of his family, and raised them, wherever he could, on the model of Napoleon I. Apart from his marriage, he loved a little here and there, without losing his heart to any. A handsome man and Prince of the blood, like him, had plenty of choice. He had a number of natural children.

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These he used to place in foreign armies, and sometimes use them later as confidential correspondents.

The last of the King's *liaisons* of any length was that with Mme Meyer von Eppinghoven. It began in the last year of the Queen's life, and she had been much concerned about it. The favourite was beautiful, cheerful, and intelligent. Quiet, and full of tact in her difficult position, she had given him many happy hours; for he loved spirited conversation above all things. Moreover, she was a good pianist, and the King loved music. It was the one power that could bring tears to his eyes and conjure up in his heart an irresistible longing for love and happiness. She knew well how to distract and entertain him, to efface grim impressions with her tender hand, to restore his happier mood.

Yet, when all is said, King Leopold had only one passion, one love—politics. The peculiar position of Belgium amongst the Great Powers demanded, and demands, a wise ruler, a man with no pronounced attachment to any particular nation. King Leopold had become quite cosmopolitan. His German principality he almost lost sight of. Certainly he was a Coburger, but at times he could almost wholly forget that Coburg was German.

For a time, when he hoped to be the Consort of the Queen of England, and during his long stay in England after Princess Charlotte's death, he had felt himself an Englishman. The feeling weakened when he ascended the Belgian Throne. French he had never felt, in spite of his connection with the Orléans family. The very idea seems ridiculous; yet it is much the same as saying that he felt English.

He was proud to reflect that, by careful steering between Liberal and Conservative principles, he had secured the domestic peace of his country and the triumph of the monarchic principle; and that at a time when powerful forces were drawn to the republican idea and, as he

wrote to Queen Victoria, on the Continent "the success of some bookseller or doctor or advocate, etc., turns the heads of all those in similar positions."<sup>1</sup>

In all his political action he was distinguished for an immense philosophic calm. His piercing gaze, which seemed to look into a man's heart, frightened many who stood before him for the first time. His diplomatic talent was of a high order. Had he not been a Prince, he certainly would have been the Foreign Minister of some State. Metternich once said that he was the best diplomatist he had ever met: very cautious, very far-seeing, and quite infinitely cunning. Duke Ernest II said that he became the political oracle of Europe.

He was very clever in giving himself the appearance of being entirely disinterested. Hence he spoke of himself as working, politically "for God."<sup>2</sup> In political as well as economic matters he followed the English principle: "Only buy as much as you can sell." His domestic budget was always balanced; and he laid the foundations of the vast wealth which his son accumulated, for the son had all the talent of his father in a predominantly business form.

He was by nature a conciliatory man, but he knew how to profit by this, for his own advantage. "Many English superficial newspaper politicians," he once said, "imagine that threatening is the thing. I believe it is the worst of all systems."<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, when it was a question of praise or blame, he had adopted the maxim of Catherine II. Once, when she had been requested to blame publicly a negligent governor, she said: "No, that will humiliate him too much. I will wait until he is alone with me. I like to praise in a loud voice, but scold in a whisper."

He agreed with the Empress again in regard to the

<sup>1</sup> Letter of March 25, 1850 (*Letters*, II, 283).

<sup>2</sup> Letter to the Archduke John, March 14, 1855 (Meran Archives).

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Queen Victoria, January 13, 1854 (*Letters*, III, 6).



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nobles. Indeed, he admired her so much that he read practically everything contemporaries had said of her. Nothing pleased him better than the ukase in which the Tsarina divides the nobles into six classes, putting the oldest into the lowest class, because fresh young merit is to be preferred to merely inherited or antiquated.

In King Leopold's mind European peace was synonymous with his own interest and that of his country, so that he steadily worked for it. He was, however, a great sceptic. He held that human nature was bad, not good. "It needs a strong hand to guide it, and people really do not want anything else." He was no soldier, in spite of his early military experiences and his sound views on military matters. He was too soft, too flexible, too much a drawing-room man, too easy-going, for that. Hence he could never understand a war for the sake of glory.

Religion, in turn, was merely politics to him. He seems to have had no personal feeling whatever for it, apart from conventional observances. Over and over again he silenced obtrusively pious folk with biting irony. Nothing, in fact, gave him greater pleasure than when people who were not quite his equals intellectually gave him an opportunity for fine irony, or even laughing at them. Stupid men, on the contrary, made him impatient, if not violently angry. People, again, who worked and thought very rapidly, and showed a certain restlessness and nervousness, got on his nerves. For he was appallingly thorough. When he spoke about a thing to anybody, he would not let him go until the matter had been explained to him from every side.

The number of his letters is legion. He made use of every possible opportunity to form and maintain a connection. Not that he was by any means always sincere. His diplomatic vein and the situation of his country counted for something in that respect. Particularly in his relations with Napoleon III he very often had a smile

on his lips, while hatred, anxiety, and fear burned in his heart. It was partly from prudence that he wrote so many letters. In order to have always a documentary witness of his words, he used to prefer to write to the dignitaries whom he saw daily, and even with members of his own family who lived in the palace with him.

Owing to his experiences at numerous Courts, in the field, in the congress room, in English mansions, and on the Belgian Throne, he was acquainted with an extraordinary number of men of all classes, particularly the men of highest distinction in some world or other. This naturally gave him a great knowledge of human nature, the best and most necessary attribute of a man who is called to occupy a Throne. He was generally right in his judgment of the men about him. It was difficult to deceive him, and no one could do it long.

He always kept his self-control, and rarely forgot himself. He had disciplined himself by severe self-criticism. Many examples of monarchs in history, of which he was a willing and zealous student, had impressed upon him the necessity of this, particularly as people were dumb in the Royal presence. The bad experiences of others, and even his own, had made him distrustful. He was convinced that the letters he committed to the post would be read. Often, counting upon that indiscretion, he posted a letter as a roundabout and apparently involuntary way of conveying information to somebody. His first instruction to a new ambassador was to warn him against using the post.

The King had a mania for offering advice to everybody. Unasked advice is, however, often unwelcome ; especially if the counsellor is right. Most people like to be left alone to perpetrate their blunders. And as statesmen are men, it is not otherwise in international politics. The King used to smile when anybody spoke of " public opinion " in such matters. He doubted if it was more than a name invented by one who knew human nature well, and would

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flatter the masses. It was difficult enough for the few who were occupied with such questions, and had prepared themselves by special study, to reach sound political opinions.

He himself was a great reader. He had a book in hand every single moment he was free. He often had books read to him, and his mind ran so quickly that he was always telling the reader to go more quickly. Sometimes he took the book from him so as to get along more rapidly.

His duties as ruler could at times terrify him, when he had to sign documents of a very grave nature. At such times he would sigh for a simple bourgeois life, free from such problems. Sometimes he had a longing for a solitary life in the country, with an interest in agriculture, and forestry, to which he paid some attention. He even coquetted with the idea that, if the worst came to the worst, he could earn his living. But he could never remain long in the country, or on his beautiful estate on Lake Como. He was soon drawn back into international politics, and could not live except in a large sphere of action. If it were not Greece, it might be England, or Belgium. It was not the love of domination. He felt that he was fitted for it, that he must work on a large scale; and it was this impulse which destined the small Coburg Prince to play so great a part. His head was master. His heart had little to say. But this restless, ambitious spirit single-handed raised the edifice of Coburg world-power.

When nature asserted its rights, and age and illness crept upon him, he fought against it with every spark of his sinking vital force. He *would not* be ill. He would have no witness of his weakness. So no one must go near him when he was confined to bed; and he painted himself, and did everything he could to conceal his position.

It could not last long. At the beginning of 1865, King Leopold felt so well that he hunted game and foxes for four or five hours, but the extreme cold of that month told upon his failing health. In February he had to take to his bed for a time, and Queen Victoria had anxiously sent her own physician to him. In the spring he was rather better, and we find him sending medical advice to the Queen.

Baron von Hügel purports to know that Queen Victoria, who was often concerned about the conduct of the Prince of Wales, begged her uncle to come over and give him good advice. Prince Edward was supposed to go wherever he was invited ; which was not consistent with his dignity, and led to much talk.<sup>1</sup> But the Prince cannot have derived much benefit from his uncle's visit, as King Leopold hardly left his bedroom during the whole of his stay.

He returned in great suffering to his capital, and from that time onward the malady made grave progress. One operation followed upon another. He still tried to conceal his condition, but at the end of July his feet swelled monstrously. His niece had recently visited him.

October brought some improvement. But Palmerston then died, and the aged King remarked that, since his most stubborn counterpart had now gone, he was sure to follow soon. Nevertheless, and although a new operation on his feet was needed, he did a little of his usual hunting in the Ardennes, shooting from a small carriage. The journals curtly announced that the King had gone to hunt in the Ardennes, and scarcely anybody knew the seriousness of his condition. At the end of November, however, these experiments, which merely tormented the King, came to a close. He could no longer leave his bed in the palace at Laeken.

In the early days of December, Queen Victoria's physician, Dr. Jenner, had come with a letter written

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Count Mensdorff-Pouilly, March 13, 1865 (State Archives).



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by the Queen, and he was to deliver it personally. He was not received. The King would have nobody in his room, not even the physicians or any member of his family. He wanted to be alone with his chamber-servant. It was with difficulty that a physician was smuggled into the Royal bedroom from time to time. A long time previously the dying monarch had strictly forbidden any person in his *entourage* to speak about his illness. He continued to fight against the inevitable fate, and would on no account have the picture of his human weakness presented to the world.

At last, on December 7th, the King received Dr. Jenner, and accepted the Queen's letter from him. But he could now hardly speak coherently. The weakness of death had fallen upon him. His thoughts hovered confusedly between Windsor and Laeken, Paris and Claremont. The name Charlotte was often on his lips. Was he thinking of the wife whose death had once moved him so deeply, or of the daughter who struggled against terrible difficulties and dangers in distant Mexico?

Some time before his fatal attack came on, he had begged his daughter-in-law, the Duchess of Brabant, to tell him when the last hour was near, because he wanted to die conscious. He had good and serious reasons for that. The Duchess recollected this solemn warning. As the King now visibly struggled with death, spoke incoherently, and at times failed to recognise those about him, she sent for the physicians early on December 10th, and asked if there was any hope.

"No, in a few hours it will all be over," they said.

The Archduchess was deeply perplexed. Should she carry out the earnest wish of her father-in-law? She decided to do so, and went with the physician to the door of the sick-room. A guard there told her that he had orders to allow no one to enter, whoever it might be. The Archduchess pushed him aside, and opened the door.

She knelt by the bed and acquitted herself of her terrible task, telling the King that his last hour had come.

The King understood. Deeply moved, he took the hand of the Archduchess. "Don't leave me," he said. They were his last words. Shortly afterwards he sank quietly back. The crowned statesman and diplomatist of Europe had breathed his last.



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## *MARRIAGES, ETC., ARRANGED BY LEOPOLD I*

1. Princess Charlotte, King Leopold's first wife, 1816-17.
2. Marie Louise, daughter of Louis Philippe, second wife, 1832-51.
3. Prince Albert, the King's nephew, Consort of Queen Victoria, 1840-61.
4. His nephew Ferdinand of Coburg-Koháry, married to Queen Maria II da Gloria, of Portugal, 1836.
5. His niece Victoria of Saxe-Coburg-Koháry, married to the Duc de Nemours, 1840.
6. His nephew, August of Saxe-Coburg, married to the Princesse Clémentine d'Orléans, 1843.
7. Attempt to marry his nephew Leopold of Saxe-Coburg to Queen Isabella II, 1846.
8. His nephew, Prince Karl von Leiningen, President of the German Imperial Ministry, 1848.
9. His son the Duke of Brabant (afterwards Leopold II), married to the Archduchess Marie Henriette, 1853.
10. His daughter Princess Charlotte, married to the Archduke Ferdinand Max, afterwards Emperor of Mexico, 1857.
15. Princess Victoria of England married to Frederick William of Prussia, 1857.
16. Attempt to put Ernest II of Coburg on the Throne of Greece, 1864.
17. Louis August of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha married to Leopoldine Teresa, daughter of Pedro II of Brazil.

## *FAMILY CONNECTIONS ARRANGED WITHOUT HIS INFLUENCE*

11. His brother-in-law, Count Mensdorff, married to Princess Sophie of Coburg.
12. His sister Julie married to the Grand Prince Constantine of Russia.
13. His sister Antoinette married to Duke Alexander of Württemberg, Russian General.
14. His brother Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg, Austrian General.



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*Printed in Great Britain by*  
UNWIN BROTHERS, LIMITED  
LONDON AND WOKING

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